THRILLING
UBLICATION
ANC
RODEO
ROMANCES
OCT.
15¢
By Courage Alone
A Complete Rodeo Novel
By CLINTON DANGERFIELD
RALEY BRIEN
CLIFF WALTERS
JOHN C. ROPKE
BUFF BRADY, JR.
FOGHORN CLANCY

SEE the new SEE!

America's Favorite Picture Magazine
is now bigger and better than ever —
more pages, more pictures, more features —
more entertainment for everybody!

GET YOUR COPY TODAY!

NOW ON SALE—ONLY 15¢ AT ALL NEWSSTANDS!

IF you're that man, here's something that will interest you.

Not a magic formula—not a get-rich-quick scheme—but something more substantial, more practical.

Of course, you need something more than just the desire to be an accountant. You've got to pay the price—be willing to study earnestly, thoroughly.

Still, wouldn't it be worth your while to sacrifice some of your leisure in favor of interesting home study—over a comparatively brief period in your life? Always provided that the rewards were good—a salary of $3,000 to $10,000?

An accountant's duties are interesting, varied and of real worth to his employers. He has *standing!*

Do you feel that such things aren't for you? Well, don't be too sure. Very possibly they *can* be!

Why not, like so many before you, investigate LaSalle's modern Problem Method of training for an accountancy position?

Just suppose you were permitted to work in a large accounting house under the personal supervision of an expert accountant. Suppose, with his aid, you studied accounting principles and solved problems day by day—easy ones at first—then the more difficult ones. If you could do this—and if you could turn to him for advice as the problems became complex—soon you'd master them all.

That's the training you follow in principle under the LaSalle Problem Method.

You cover accountancy from the basic Principles right up through Accountancy Systems and Income Tax Procedure. Then you add C. P. A. Training and prepare for the C. P. A. examinations.

As you go along, you absorb the principles of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Statistical Control, Organization, Management and Finance.

Your progress is as speedy as you care to make it—depending on your own eagerness to learn and the time you spend in study.

Will recognition come? The only answer, as you know, is that success *does* come to the man who is really *trained.* It's possible your employers will notice your improvement in a very few weeks or months. Indeed, many LaSalle graduates have paid for their training—with increased earnings—before they have completed it! For accountants, who are trained in organization and management, are the executives of the future.

Write For This Free Book

For your own good, don't put off investigation of *all* the facts. Write for our free 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays." It'll prove that accountancy offers brilliant futures to those who aren't afraid of serious home study. Send us the coupon *now.*

Over 2300 Certified Public Accountants among LaSalle alumni

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION

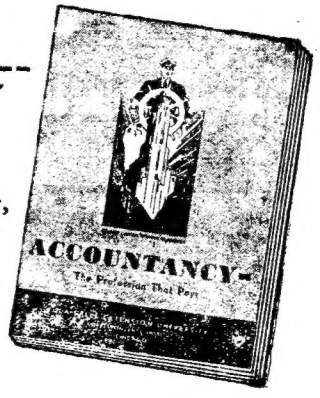
417 South Dearborn Street, Dept. 10329-H, Chicago 5, Illinois

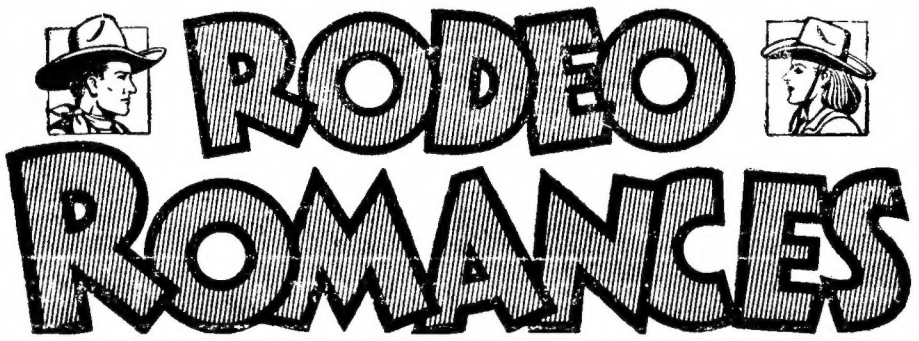
I want to be an accountant. Send me, without cost or obligation, the 48-page book, "Accountancy, The Profession That Pays," and full information about your accountancy training program.

Name.....

Address..... *City*.....

Position..... *Age*.....





Vol. 9, No. 2 FOGHORN CLANCY, Editor October, 1947

A Complete Novel

BY COURAGE ALONE.....Clinton Dangerfield 11
Relentlessly his past pursues Brock Dorn into the rodeo arena—and when at last fame and romance are within his reach, a hidden enemy strikes!

A Novelet of the Arena

DEVIL IN THE SADDLE.....John C. Ropke 82
Ace bronc peeler Wayne Dodson always put up one whale of a good show, but the audience booed him every time he appeared in the ring!

Short Stories

RECKON YOU'RE RIGHT.....Will Garth 49
When Jane Hunter enters the roping contest, a heart's lassoed

MAVERICK CHAMPIONS.....Sam Brant 52
An old-timer's quest has a stirring payoff in the arena at Calgary

LEATHER THRONE.....Cliff Walters 67
Bill Bronson goes into action to save everything he holds dear

RODEO ROWDY.....Raley Brien 96
Under cover of night, powerful forces work against Bill Laney

Special Features

IN THE ARENA.....A Department 6
Where readers and the editor meet

A DOUBLE ROMANCE.....Buff Brady, Jr. 62
A true story of how fate brought four rodeo folks together

THRILLS IN RODEO.....Foghorn Clancy 77
Exciting arena adventures of well-known rodeo personalities

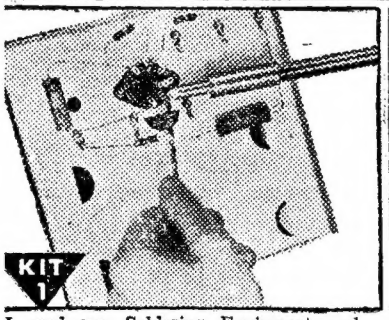
RODEO ROMANCES published every other month and copyright 1947 by Best Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Single copies, 15 cents. 12 issues, $1.80. Re-entered as second class matter February 27, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

Read our companion magazines: Triple Western, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Love, Detective Mystery Novel, Mystery Book Magazine, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Football, Popular Western, Popular Detective, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Love, Popular Football, Texas Rangers, G-Men Detective, West, Detective Novel Magazine, Triple Detective, Sky Fighters, The Phantom Detective, Everyday Astrology, Masked Rider Western, Range Riders Western, Startling Stories, Black Book Detective, The Rio Kid Western, Popular Crossword Puzzles, Exciting Western, Exciting Sports, and Exciting Love.

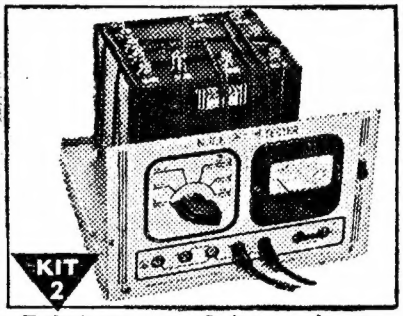
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

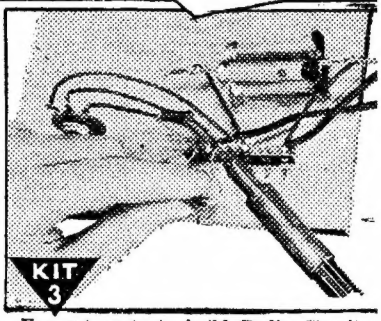
I Send You Big Kits of Radio Parts



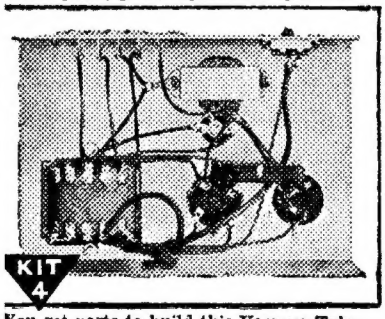
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



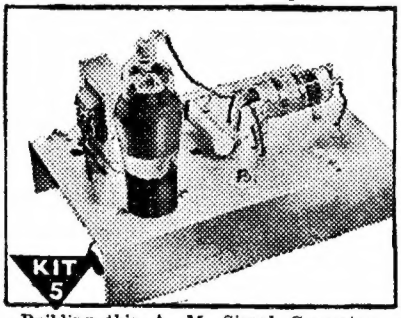
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



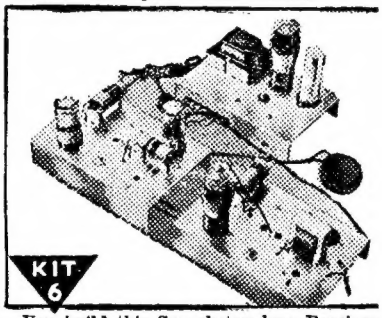
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

KNOW RADIO—*Win Success*

I Will Train You at Home—SAMPLE LESSON FREE

APPROVED for training under G.I. BILL

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in RADIO —Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that show how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even *greater* opportunities as Television, FM, and Electronic devices become available to the public! Send for FREE books now!

Find Out What NRI Can Do For Yo

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson a my FREE 64-page book. Read the d tails about my Course; letters fro men I trained; see how quickly, easi you can get started. No obligatio Just MAIL COUPON NOW in envelo or paste on penny postal. **J. E. SMITH President, Dept. 7K09, National Rad Institute,** ***Pioneer Home Study Rad School,*** **Washington 9, D. C.**

My training includes TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS • F M

VETERANS

You can get this training right in your own home under G. I. Bill. Mail coupon for full details.

Good for Both—FREE

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7K09
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

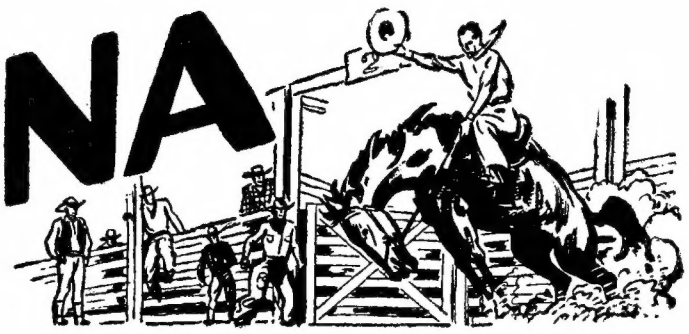
Mail me FREE, your sample lesson and 64-page book. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name.....Age.....

Address.....

City.....Zone....State.....

IN THE ARENA



Where Readers and the Editor Meet

By FOGHORN CLANCY

HI, WADDIES, here we are taking up our position In the Arena once more to give out with range and rodeo gossip and to try and keep rodeo fans and those who like things Western posted on what is going on with the cowboys and cowgirls of the arena and the range.

The big business of the past three years in rodeo has caused many new promoters and producers to spring up. It was the same right after the close of the First World War and it looks like history will repeat itself, so far as the rodeo game is concerned. Men are going into the rodeo business as producers and promoters without the proper experience or training, and without the proper equipment.

For the past three years the people of the United States have wanted a good deal of recreation, and this caused them to fill the seating capacity of most rodeos to overflowing. All amusements reaped a harvest. Rodeos in particular were breaking records of attendance all over the country.

Naturally there were many who saw the business that was being done by amusements and especially by rodeos, and decided that it was the business for them. Many of the rodeo contestants have become producers or promoters. Sometimes in the past contestants have made good as producers, but not often, as there is as much difference in contesting and producing as there is between being a locomotive engineer or a train dispatcher.

Some of the new producers who started out early this season are already folding up and giving it up as a bad job. Business cannot always remain at its top peak so far as amusements are concerned, and of course that will cause the situation to revert to "The survival of the fittest." The strong and experienced producers will survive, and the less experienced, and those not financially able to take occasional losses, will fall by the wayside.

Southwestern Livestock Show

It was a hot contest all the way during the recent Southwestern Livestock Show Rodeo at El Paso, Texas.

Verne Elliott was the producer and arena director, Shirley Hussey and Carl Dossey were the judges, Creta Elliott and Elmer Hepler were the timers, Cy Taillon was the announcer. Among the trick riders were Bernice Dossey, Jean Allen, Buff Brady and Dick Griffith. John Lindsay, George Mills and Jasbo Fulkerson were the judges.

Buster Ivory and Bud Spealman were the bronc riding champions of the six days' show. Ivory had a close race for the finals in the saddle bronc riding, when Larry Finley became the second bronc rider to make a qualified ride on Verne Elliott's tough bucker, "Squaw Man." Tom Knight had previously turned the trick by riding the roan bucking demon in the first go-round of the show, although neither cowboy was able to spur the horse sufficiently to rate first money. Ivory rode "T-Joe," another tough horse, to win the second go-round and final prize in the saddle bronc riding.

Bud Spealman, 1946 bareback bronc riding champion, had little competition on the final day when only two bareback bronc riders made qualified rides.

Toots Mansfield won the calf roping for the third consecutive year. He was closely pressed by Troy Fort, who finished second. Fort just three weeks previous at the San Angelo, Texas, rodeo, had lowered the world's calf roping record to 10.7 seconds.

Carl Dossey took top honors in the steer

(Continued on page 8)

THOUSANDS NOW PLAY

who never thought they could!

Thrilled by Playing

I've had my lessons just a week. I think your course is super. I was more thrilled than words can express when I found I could actually play America, The Merry Widow Waltz and the others.
*J. T., Mancelona, Mich.

Wouldn't Take $1000 for Course

The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course. *S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

Shares Course With Sister

The teaching is so interesting and the pieces so beautiful I couldn't ask for anything better. I recommend your course highly. My sister shares it with me and feels the same way.
*D. E. G., Wausau, Wisc.

Finding New Joy

I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.
*C. S. Lucien, Okla.

Plays After 2 Months

I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.
*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

You, too, can play any instrument By this EASY A-B-C Method

YOU think it's difficult to learn music? That's what thousands of others have thought! Just like you, they long to play some instrument — the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorites. But they denied themselves the pleasure —because they thought it took months and years of tedious study to learn.

Learn in Spare Time at Home

And then they made an amazing discovery! They learned about a wonderful way to learn music at home—without a private teacher—without tedious study—and in a surprisingly short time. They wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the facts about this remarkable short-cut method. And the facts opened their eyes! They were amazed to find how easy it was to learn.

The result? Over 850-000 men and women have studied music at home this simple, A-B-C way. Now, all over the world, enthusiastic music-lovers are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of creating their own music. They have found the key to good time, popularity and profit.

Costs only few cents a Day

And that's what **you** can do, right now. Get the proof that you, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument — quickly, easily, in spare time at home for only a few cents a day. Never mind if you have no musical knowledge, training or talent. Just read the fascinating booklet and Print and Picture sample that fully explain all about the famous U. S. School method. If interested tear out the coupon now, before you turn the page. U. S. School of Music, 29410 Brunswick Bldg. New York 10, N. Y. Largest school of its kind in the world. (49th year)

FREE!
Print and Picture Sample

NOTICE
Please don't confuse our method with any systems claiming to teach "without music" or "by ear". We teach you easily and quickly to play **real music**, any music, by standard notes . . . not by any trick or number system.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC,
29410 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet "How to Learn Music at Home," and your free Print and Picture Sample.

Piano	Saxophone	Clarinet	Practical Finger Control
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Trombone	Piccolo
Hawaiian Guitar	Reed Organ	Flute	Mandolin
Violin	Tenor Banjo	Modern Elementary Harmony	
Piano Accordion	Ukulele		

Have you Instrument?.....

Name.....
(Please print)

Address.....

City.....State.....

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age, parent must sign coupon.

SAVE 2c — STICK COUPON ON PENNY POSTCARD

Learn this Profitable Profession

IN 90 DAYS AT HOME

MONEY-MAKING CAREER OPEN to MEN and WOMEN, 18 to 50

Hundreds of men and women between 18 and 50 make $10 to $20 in a single day giving Scientific Swedish Massage and Hydro-Therapy treatments. There is big demand from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums and clubs. Graduates earn large full time incomes from these or in private practice in their own offices. Others make good money from home treatments given in spare time. Learn this interesting, money-making profession in your own home, through our home study course. Same instructors as in our **nationally known** resident school. **You can win independence** and prepare for future security by qualifying for our Diploma. Course can be completed in 3 to 4 months. Many earn while they learn. Begin your training at once.

Anatomy Charts & Booklet FREE

Enroll now and we will include, at no extra cost, many needed supplies. Fit yourself to help meet growing demand for Scientific Swedish Massage. **Send the coupon at once for complete details. Anatomy Charts and 32-page illustrated Booklet. FREE, postpaid.**

THE COLLEGE OF SWEDISH MASSAGE
Dept. 763M, 100 East Ohio St., Chicago 11, Illinois

Please send me FREE and postpaid, Anatomy Charts, 32-page Booklet and complete details on Home Training.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" together with "Record of Invention" form—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
78-K District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

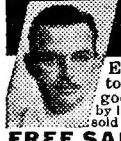
Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. **Free** Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-758, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

DETECTIVES

Home Study in Detective Training—Professionally Modernized—Recognized Instructors—Easy Payments—Write:
INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL
1701-T Monroe St., N. E. Washington 18, D. C.

SELL SHOES DESIGNED BY Dr. R. M. KIEL D. S. C.



Every man or woman in your territory needs the supreme comfort and good looks of these fine shoes, made by leading company of its kind... and sold thru well-paid Direct Salesmen.

FREE SAMPLE OUTFIT!...
Learn how you can earn liberal Cash Profits Daily with 200 styles of Shoes, Leather Jackets, Raincoats, etc. We show you how to fit each customer perfectly, and furnish you **FREE** with everything you need. Send name, address on a post-card now!

CONSOLIDATED SHOE SYSTEM
DEPT. S-814, CHIPPEWA FALLS, WISCONSIN

IN THE ARENA

(Continued from page 6)

wrestling. Hub Whiteman, who set a new steer wrestling record of four seconds flat for the show, went out of the final money when his last steer got away from him.

Pee Wee Morris, RCA bull riding champion of 1946, was carried unconscious from the arena in the saddle bronc riding event during the last day of the show, but returned to the arena and made a swell ride on his last bull to clinch the championship in the bull riding event.

It was necessary for Verne Elliott, the producer, who furnished the stock for the rodeo, to purchase a complete new string of claves for the calf roping, bulls for the bull riding and steers for the steer wrestling, on account of the prevailing foot and mouth disease across the border in Mexico. These cattle were quarantined after the close of the show, but at last report it was expected that they would shortly be released from quarantine.

The jackpot roping event was won by Jack Skipworth, with Troy Fort second and Walton Poage third.

In the matched calf ropings, which were for four calves each, Toots Mansfield defeated Homer Pettigrew in the first match, with a time of 63.4 seconds against Pettigrew's 68.1 seconds. Zeano Ferris won a close match with N. A. Pittcock, with 74.8 seconds against Pittcock's 75.9 seconds; and Lefty Wilken won over Jim Espy with 93.7 seconds against Espy's 112.8 seconds.

Special acts, included John Lindsey and his bull, "Iron Ore," The Moore family with the mule "Beeswax," and Bill Cardwell with his sheep dogs.

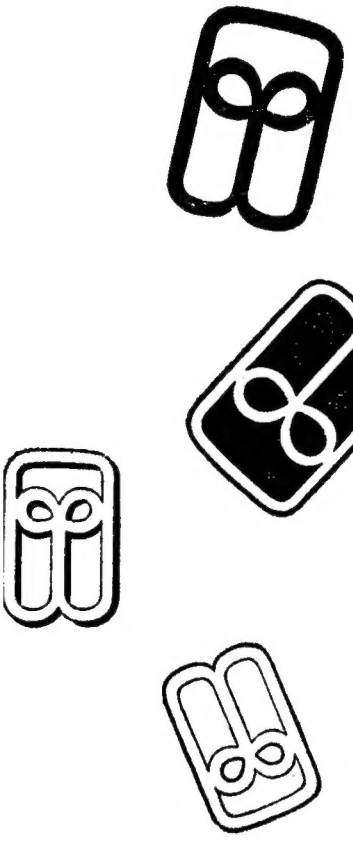
Complete Results

The complete results including winners by go-rounds and finals, are as follows:

In Calf Roping: First Go-round—1st, Toots Mansfield; 2nd, Troy Fort; 3rd & 4th tied and split between Buddy Derrick and Bill Linderman. Second Go-round—1st, Toots Mansfield; 2nd, Dan Taylor; 3rd, Walton Poage; 4th, Troy Fort. Finals—1st, Toots Mansfield; 2nd, Troy Fort; 3rd, Walton Poage; 4th, Buddy Derrick.

In Steer Wrestling: First Go-round—1st, Bill Linderman; 2nd, Bill McMackin; 3rd, Carl Dossey; 4th, Dave Campbell. Second go-round—1st, Hub Whiteman; 2nd, Homer

(Continued on page 105)



Why be a Papuan?

OUR FRIEND, the anthropologist, told us that only a Papuan could have designed these ceremonial masks. We'd have believed him — except for one thing. We know the man who doodled them . . . just traced the outline of a paper clip and shaded to suit.

Try it. Or better yet — *don't* try it. There's no great demand for Papuans — or for constant doodlers — in the world of business and industry. The demand is for *trained* men and women. The large rewards — promotions, greater responsibilities, increased salaries — go to those who master commercial and technical subjects.

Training in all these fields is available through the International Correspondence Schools. In the time it takes a Papuan to make a mask . . . in the same time many a man spends in doodling . . . *you* can master Plastics or Accounting, Drafting or Radio — any of more than 400 subjects — through study with I. C. S.

If you're as smart as we think you are, you'll act today to obtain full information on the I. C. S. Course in your field of interest. Just mark and mail the coupon and you're in touch with us. Do it *right now!*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3966-K, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

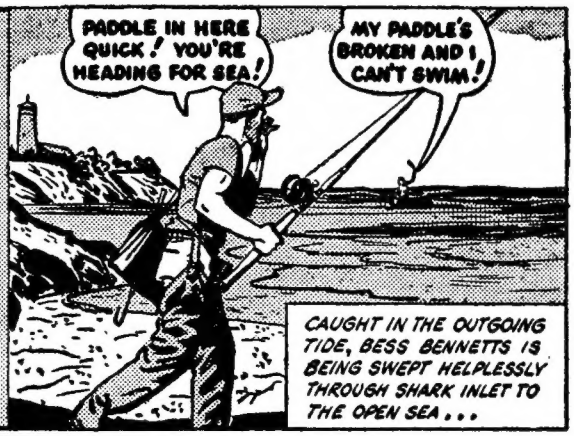
*Name*_____ *Age*____ *Home Address*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____ *Present Position*_____

*Working Hours*_____ *A.M. to*_____ *P.M.* **Length of Service In World War II**_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Enrollment under the G.I. Bill of Rights approved for War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

IT WAS MORE THAN "FISHERMAN'S LUCK" WHEN . . .



CAUGHT IN THE OUTGOING TIDE, BESS BENNETTS IS BEING SWEPT HELPLESSLY THROUGH SHARK INLET TO THE OPEN SEA . . .

USING EVERY OUNCE OF HIS FISHING SKILL, LOU YOUNG SLOWLY "PLAYS" THE CANOE AND ITS PASSENGER INTO SHOAL WATER . . .

FOR THE QUICKEST, EASIEST SHAVES YOU EVER HAD WITH A LOW-PRICE BLADE, TRY THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER, SMOOTHER FINISHED AND LONGER LASTING. ALSO THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY AND PROTECT YOU FROM THE IRRITATING EFFECT OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
4 for 10¢

A Complete Novel

The horse rapidly overtook the fleeing girl (CHAP.III)

By Courage Alone

By CLINTON DANGERFIELD

Relentlessly his past pursues Brock Dorn into the rodeo arena—and when at last fame and romance are within his reach, a hidden enemy strikes at him with brutal cunning!

CHAPTER I

The Cry for Mercy!

WORKING to get a buckle tongue through a stiff leather strap, Brock Dorn thought, with some bitterness, that it was hard when a man's success could be his worst enemy.

He had managed the Red Gulch ranch so well that Nan Hames, who had raised him, wouldn't give him the freedom he coveted. He must stay a couple of years longer because of the gratitude he owed her, and because her own son, Losset, wild, spoiled, took no interest whatsoever in anything but his own pleasure.

That pleasure now included trying to

get a certain girl away from one of the Camerons.

Both Nan and Brock supposed that Losset was still in bed and asleep. Dawn was just breaking, dull, sullen, threatening rain, and at no time was Losset an early riser. Bone-lazy Brock thought.

The buckle tongue finally got through. He lifted his head and listened. Was that sound born from the hoofbeats of a racing horse, coming in?

Red Gulch Nan passed him. Harsh faced and cold mannered, she went into the barn to get chicken feed for her small flock. Neither spoke but, as she vanished, Brock sprang up.

That was a horse coming in—and being ridden hard! Inside the barn a hen cackled. Nan Hames found the nest and gathered ten eggs in her lifted apron. She was a thrifty widow. The eggs brought a good price.

The running horse and his rider swept into sight.

Brock sprang up. Watching the racing bay approach, his frank and kindly face hardened into deep anger. Now the lathered gelding dashed through the open barnyard gate and checked to a sliding halt beside Brock.

Brock reddened with rage. Losset in the saddle was white, his eyes wide with terror.

"You swore to me you'd never touch Monte again!" Brock's voice was a menacing growl. "Yet you sneaked out last night, I see, with my special horse and my outfit. Get down and take the thrashing you've earned."

Losset slipped from the saddle but hooked an arm around the horn for support. He gasped, ignoring the anger and the threat.

"They're after me—the Camerons. I killed Ian Cameron in self defense. I'm wounded. Brock—must have help. You must ride Monte on a few miles—draw 'em off me so I can stagger into the hills and hide. They're drunk, Brock, drunk and lynch-ripe. They'll string me up—never listening to what I say. Only give me this little start. When they catch up with you you've only to tell them the truth—they'll believe you—everybody believes you, Brock! I—"

LOSSET choked for breath. Brock's eyes were hard, narrowing. "You claim self defense? Ian was a plumb decent man. I bet you murdered him!"

Unheeded by either, Nan had run to them from the barn, letting her eggs drop from her apron. She opened her paling lips to speak but, before she could utter a sound Losset screamed:

"Don't use that word, Brock! It wasn't murder. Self defense. No time to explain. Oh, Brock! Are you going to commit murder yourself by denying me this little start? When these hellions catch up with you, they'll not hurt you, even if you admit you wanted to give me a start. You know that. You know it!"

Yes, he did know the Camerons would believe him. They might doubt at first but when Nan confirmed his statement that he'd been at home since six yesterday, they'd have to admit defeated revenge. Losset would be gone. They might suspect him but there'd be no evidence. Brock found it hard to think as the anguished clamoring of Losset went on beating at his ears.

Then Nan threw at him a plea which cut like a sword.

"You'd not be alive but for me, Brock," she cried. "Didn't I pick you out of the flood that drowned your folks? Didn't I fetch you home, you that had hardly learned to walk? Didn't I raise you, feed you, clothe you? Didn't I give you your life? A life for a life! Save Losset!" To Brock's horror she was on her knees to him, clutching at him, groveling as she pleaded—this woman who had often treated him with harsh arrogance or had as often been moodily indifferent to him. She wailed on.

He pulled her up, angrily. "You don't have to do that! Give me a chance to think. How can I when you're hollerin' so loud?"

But she'd turned to Losset. The slicker he wore was Brock's. It hung open. There was a big splotch of fresh blood on Losset's right shoulder.

"He's wounded, badly," she shrieked at Brock. "My son is wounded and you ask time to think when every second counts." She tried to support Losset.

"Keep off, Mar," he snarled. "I can still crawl off to hide out, if only I get a few minutes start. Brock, for Heaven's sake!"

Brock stood irresolute. Deep down in his subconscious mind rose a warning.

"You killed Ian over that she-fox Juanita, though I told you she was poison," he accused.

"Yes, Juanita. He tried to kill me—for her." He was discarding the slicker and looking at Brock with frantic eyes. "You were right, Brock, always! I've not done you right, but don't hate me now when I'm at

In a desperate effort to escape from the blood-soaked dog, the horses sprang to one side, overturning the buckboard (CHAP. VIII)

your mercy. Only put this on—and this!" He shoved Brock's own sombrero on Brock's head. "Now draw them a little, just a little way! I'll be your friend forever. I'm innocent. You doubt me, but you weren't there."

"All you've got to do is bring the Camerons here, Brock, and I'll tell them, instantly, that you've been home since yesterday sunset," Nan babbled. "I'll say a horse thief rode your bay and you are out after him. I'll say Losset is off buying cattle. But we've only minutes, Brock! Anything you tell them I'll stand by. I gave you life, and all I ask is a little start for Loss'. That's all I ask."

She dropped to her knees again, lifting a blanched face.

So riding the foam-spattered, weary Monte, wearing the black slicker and the white sombrero, Brock left the barnyard, Nan calling impassioned words of gratitude after him. The whole affair had been a matter of minutes in which Brock's mind had been divided—his natural generosity fighting against his distrust. Yet he had not only Nan as a witness, he had also an old cowboy respected for his good character. This man had left only a half hour ago.

BROCK had liked Ian. The Camerons knew that. Any motive for murder on Brock's part was absent. Taken altogether, Brock was slightly ashamed of the hesitation he had shown to Nan. For Nan alone he was protecting Losset, worthless, good-looking skirt-chasing Losset who had never worked.

The Camerons didn't pass the house. They had tracked the killer's horse until they were a half mile from the corral. Then they had seen the black slicker and white sombrero riding along the top of a high bare ridge and they had quit the tracks and had short-cutted for the ridge—just as Brock had intended they should.

He slacked Monte to a walk, for the horse was very tired. Brock patted his shoulder. As soon as he got back to Nan's, he would give Monte a thorough rubbing down.

Losset would have to leave the state, Brock felt sure, and on Nan's account Brock was sorry for this, but he himself would be glad to run her ranch without Losset's bad example to the couple of cowboys the small ranch employed under Brock's authority.

Losset drank, gambled whenever he could get any dinero to gamble with, never worked and borrowed Brock's personal property whenever he saw fit. This last habit had earned him a couple of lickings at Brock's hand. He had gone yelping to Nan about Brock's administration of discipline, but Nan had refused to fire Brock—Brock who, young as he was, had actually been making her little ranch pay.

Brock's uneasiness was gone now. He was glad he was giving Losset a chance to pull out. Being a fugitive might yet teach Losset some horse sense.

Nan had a hidden financial resource.

If Losset pulled out, as go he must now, Nan would give him a good stake to leave with, out of the secret cache which Losset had vainly tried to find. Both men knew she had one, because every now and then she paid for supplies or paid wages in gold pieces.

Losset had found it useless to ask Nan where her cache of money was. He tried that and she merely had become mute, knowing well what her son would do with her gold if he knew its whereabouts. Or if she spoke, she denied existence of any cache impatiently.

But Brock had found it. It was at some distance from the house and he had come upon it while he was out looking for a young stallion he'd named Stag because the horse was an amazing jumper. Brock made a pet of him, and fed him sugar.

Nan didn't know of Brock's discovery, and the horde of gold was as safe as it had ever been, guarded by Brock's honesty.

Yes, Nan would stake her son. When she heard from him, would she take her gold and follow? Then, Brock felt, freedom would at last be his! He could leave the Red Gulch ranch forever for Widow Nan would sell out to be with Losset.

The Camerons were close now. They wouldn't fire on him. They were not Jedwood justice men. "Fire first and try afterward." They would, unless he tried to escape, investigate.

They shouted to him presently. He stopped and waited for them.

They closed round him as quietly as leopards could have done. Except for the stepping of their horses, he heard no sound. They looked at him with a grim calm and a searching scrutiny that didn't miss a single boss of foam on the lathered horse, nor the fact that his boots were not foam spattered. They raked the black slicker and the white sombrero with their united gaze, and he saw

each man had identified the garments, just as he knew they had identified the horse.

Under their suppressed fury he saw suppressed grief, a grief which only made their fury more deadly. He fixed his steady glance on Roderick Cameron usually the leader.

"Well, Rod?" he said.

Roderick Cameron spoke in thick hoarse tones:

"You murdered Ian last night."

"No! I never harmed Ian at any time."

"You going to deny you were in Hamaca last night?"

"Yes, I deny it."

"The rider shot down Ian in cold blood, drilling him in the back from an alley."

"Ah, if I'd *known* that!" thought Brock. "Instead of *aiding* him, I'd have seen him wither before I helped him escape. He—"

Roderick Cameron was talking. "He wore this slicker, this white sombrero, rode this lathered horse. All three are yours."

"They are mine." Brock felt he could see Losset dead with satisfaction, but he remembered Nan on her knees in the dust looking up with frantic eyes.

The youngest Cameron cut in: "That proves him guilty. We'll waste no more time. Let's hang him. It burns me up to have him here, answering cool as a cucumber, while Ian lies in blood back there." He was shoving his horse forward toward Brock. Roderick caught its rein and forced it back.

"I'm handling this in my own way. His boots are clean."

"He could have wiped them off."

Roderick silenced his brother again and turned back to Brock.

"Can you prove you weren't in Hamaca last night?"

"Nan Hames knows I slept home last night. Twice in the night she woke me to say something was after the chickens. I went out twice and came back and went to bed. She woke me this morning at dawn."

"You're shielding someone," Roderick accused abruptly. "Who?"

"Cut the palaver," stormed the youngest Cameron, "and we'll take him to Nan and see what she says."

"She'll say just what I told you," Brock answered and rode with his captors toward the house.

Brock had no fear for his own safety. Nan would be an accepted witness, but his mind was in a turmoil of anger and disgust toward Losset. Shooting a man in the back! Deliberately doing it in another man's outfit. Coward and cur!

CHAPTER II

Netted

GLADLY the bay horse carried his master back to the ranch corrals, for Monte was not only tired, he was hungry. He was delighted to be rid of Losset who was always rough with horses. Monte loved the sound of Brock's voice. But instead of stopping at the corrals, the group of riders swept up to the front porch where Nan sat rocking and picking over some dry beans.

Brock waited confidently as Roderick put his question as to where Brock was last night.

But when Nan spoke he could scarcely believe his own ears as, in a monotonous frozen tone, she testified that Brock Dorn had been out all night, that he'd only recently ridden in, stopped a moment to say he was in trouble, then had forced his tired horse to hurry on.

She looked straight at the Camerons while she spoke but not once at Brock.

Roderick Cameron stared at her. "Losset out too?"

"My son Losset was ill last night—something like ptomaine poison from some canned stuff. I nursed him all night. He's much better this morning." She called out harshly. "Losset! Come out here."

And Losset came, yawning, stretching, sleepy-eyed, rumpling his thick silky hair with lazy fingers. There was no sign of injury about him. He gazed, slightly open mouthed, at the Camerons.

"What's up, boys?" he asked briskly.

Roderick Cameron said bitterly, "Ian was shot from his horse, in cold blood, by a man in a white sombrero, a black slicker, riding this bay that Brock is on now. Where were you last night, Losset?"

"Home in bed all night. Bad sick."

"Where was Brock Dorn last night?"

"He told me he was riding to Hamaca. I was too ill to care where anybody went."

A menacing growl of rage came from four of the Camerons. Through it Brock's keenly intelligent mind was racing, stripped now of the fog of the mother and son's anguished

pleading. Which one of them had realized the hellish opportunity offered them made little difference. They were both united by Losset's immediate danger and Nan's fierce maternal instinct had been ready to hold Losset with her in safety, despite any cost.

Brock was about to speak, about to lay the whole hideous truth before the Camerons when again a racing rider turned attention away. To Brock's deep relief the younger of his two cowboys galloped up to the house. He could be sent for the old cowboy who knew Brock was at home last night. Before Brock could speak the younger cowboy broke out:

"I told old Jerry not to ride that claybank, Brock. Out there in the north pasture, it just killed him."

Brock felt stunned. His roughly good-looking young face was expressionless. Jerry dead! Of what use to tell the real truth, to expose the treachery of these two on the porch? "I'm sorry about old Jerry," he said slowly, hoping against hope. "I was fond of him. I told him to keep off that claybank, Pete."

"Yeah. But he was rarin' to prove he was still as good as any man. What about his body, Brock? This horse pitches so I couldn't pack it in."

"I'll take care of old Jerry," Nan cut in hoarsely, addressing the Camerons.

"Did Jerry mention to you, Pete, that I was home all last night," Brock asked. "Did he say that he had one of his old colicky attacks, and that I doctored him?"

"No, Brock. You know old Jerry was always ashamed of being sick."

"No more talk. Let's ride with him, boys," one of the Camerons snarled.

"Roderick, I want time enough to tell the truth about—about these two," Brock said steadily.

THROUGH Roderick's insistence, he got his chance but through the telling Nan and Losset looked at him in a simulated horror. When he had finished, only Pete believed him, only Pete tried to stop the Camerons when they said it was time to go. Had it been just Losset against Brock, things might have gone differently, but Nan, in saving her passionately loved Losset, was no mean actress. She was completely convincing for she, with apparent reluctance, had added another lie, that Brock and Ian had met here a week ago and had quarreled—Brock threatening that before long he'd settle the score.

"I forgive Brock his lies about us," she said brokenly. "I've been a mother to him." She wiped her eyes.

Not much more was said. Brock Dorn rode away with his captors. He was still on his Monte horse, not asking a fresh one. He knew the ride wouldn't be long and it was some slight help to have Monte's love while hate and loathing rode beside him. How far would they travel?

Not far—but not too close. As they had turned to ride away with the man who must die, Nan, stiff voiced and ashy white had gasped out:

"Not near my home, boys. Not near."

They'd assented to her wish. Now the ranchhouse and the corrals were out of sight behind the mounted group.

The youngest Cameron wept as he rode, seeing again in memory his dead brother's bloody body; the others kept a grim and ruthless self control.

By now Brock had recovered from his first shock of horror and astonishment. He was wise enough to realize he had no time to waste in emotion, either hate or grief. He turned his thoughts to other things—such as escape, of getting out of this trap into which he had fallen.

He knew his peril. Death loomed over him. The Camerons would be hard and ruthless in their vengeance. They would hang him without mercy, and if Brock hoped to escape, he must seize the first opportunity that presented itself.

He had no gun. His hands were tied behind his back. The Camerons were leading the horse which he was riding, watchful of any attempt by him to leap down some brushy bank.

Being brave men themselves, his captors showed no surprise at his courage. Probably the only thing that did surprise them was the fact that he had murdered Ian. And that he had murdered Ian, they were now convinced. Up to now Nan had been known for her blunt truthfulness, and her story about the quarrel between Brock and Ian was accepted without question. Had there been a woman in the party, she might have sensed the truth. The maternal instinct! What a powerful incentive it can be! As to the terrible depths into which Nan had fallen, the Camerons could have no inkling.

Yes, Brock well realized his peril. With

every yard the party covered, his active brain weighed chances and balanced the odds against him.

Desperately his thoughts raced from one possibility to another. Unless he could get a lucky break or help from someone, he was through. He considered one expedient after another, dwelling on every possibility and then rejecting each one as hopeless. Finally he remembered about Nan's secret cache, recalling how frantically—and vainly—Losset had hunted for it.

It was only by chance that Brock had discovered that cache. But he was of an observant nature and, one day, his piercing glance had noticed a shred of Nan's dress hanging to a brier. Below the fragment were her faint footprints. The rest was easy for him. Behind a rock slide, he had found the mouth of a cave.

The following morning he had taken with him two lariats to the hole in the ground. Joining the ropes together and making one end of the line secure to a tree, he had descended into the cavern, carrying in his pocket a candle and some matches.

REACHING the bottom of the pit, about fifty feet below, he had crept through a tunnel and emerged in a cave large enough to house a small cabin. Here there was a narrow padlocked chest on a ledge and a telltale gold piece, almost concealed by dirt.

Had Brock been dishonest, it would have been easy for him to have broken open the chest and taken the treasure. But it had been only curiosity which led him there, and amusement at the adventure, not greed. The thought of stealing it never entered his mind. Nan's secret had been safe with him.

Now, in his extremity, he wondered if he could turn the discovery to his own advantage. He remembered that the cave where Nan kept her gold horde had two entrances—the one which Brock had used to get in and a tunnel on the far side of Buzzard's Hill, which Nan used in visiting the cavern.

With desperate intensity he wondered if, in some way, he could use Nan's secret to save himself. He rejected the thought of trying to buy his life with the gold. In the first

When he again turned to look at Shard, he saw that a rattlesnake had come out of a crack in the wall and was slowly crawling over the body of the unconscious rodeo star (CHAP. IX)

place the Camerons were honest. They were a hard-drinking, savage crew, but they were not thieves, and would never think of taking the hidden hoard of the widowed Nan, whom they believed to be a fine woman.

Then again, even if they were tempted for a moment, the chest might be empty, and disappointment would only increase their anger. Yet there must be some way of utilizing the cache to get out of this mess? Then he had an idea!

Brock thought over that idea. The horses continued to move onward. In his ears the beat of their shod hoofs had a funereal sound. In this emergency, his senses had become extraordinarily keen. Mechanically he noticed the faint scream of an eagle pouncing on its prey and the raucous call of a jay from a tree top. Such noises seemed to mock him.

The basis of Brock's inspiration was the knowledge that any request on his part would instantly be refused by the Camerons.

At last Brock spoke to his captors.

"Boys, since I've got to die, there's one thing I want to ask of you," he said thickly.

They stared at him with hostile eyes, eyes burning with hate, but they listened.

"Once Ian Cameron and I rode over Buzzard Hill," he said slowly, his voice shaken. "We met there by accident. On Buzzard Oak we saw—both of us—the body of a horse thief. You remember the time?"

"Yes, what of it?" snarled a Cameron. More wolfishly than ever he stared at Brock.

Brock said apparently choking a little:

"Ian—said to me, slow and earnest: 'Brock, if I was ever murdered like that poor feller, I'd come back and haunt the man who done it, by Heaven, I would!' Boys I—if he—if Ian—believed I murdered him, he might be waiting for me on that bench. Boys I don't want to see a ghost as I die!" Brock knew well enough that, without directly saying he'd murdered Ian Cameron, his words would seem to imply a guilty conscience.

"You drygulching devil, that's exactly the place where you'll be strung up," the youngest Cameron yelled furiously. "This way boys!"

They turned off for Buzzard's Hill.

The horses pushed briskly forward.

As yet Brock Dorn scarcely dared to believe his first move was successful. He tried to keep a grim and steady control of himself, neither hoping nor fearing too much.

Soon they were riding up Buzzard's Hill toward the bench cut in its side. On that bench grew only one tree, the tree which had once borne such hideous fruit. Lightning had torn and blackened half the tree but the heavy limb from which the horse thief had once hung was still there and still strong.

To Brock's eyes that sinister tree was the one friendly object on his limited landscape, for the oak grew near the inner edge of the bench. It was on the inner edge that early-world forces, in slicing out the bench, had revealed the fault in the sustaining rock slide. Then plant growth had risen and now the slide mouth was masked by a heavy tangle of brier and low shrubs. The lynchers didn't cast a second glance on this screen, for they could not guess anything of interest lay behind it.

LONG ago wind and heavy rains had removed any trace of Brock's former entrance.

The bench edge against the hilltop was rough and irregular. Near the upper mouth of Nan's secret cave, the cliff wall formed a rude triangle, with the mouth of the cave at its apex. Directly opposite the triangle under the sullen strength of the thick oak limb, the avengers of Ian Cameron halted Brock's Monte horse.

Brock said steadily as one of them began loosening up a lariat, "Boys, before you throw that rope over the branch, I claim the right every dying man has granted him. I want five minutes of life."

"Five minutes to pray yourself into Heaven?" jeered Rothsay Cameron. "You're signed and sealed to hang, you cowardly murderer! You don't get no five minutes to waste on prayer!"

But Roderick Cameron interfered. "It's his right, Rothsay. He must have it."

Rothsay, who had deeply loved his dead brother, subsided muttering to himself.

"Can I have my hands loose that five minutes?" Brock said in cold level tones.

They growled a refusal of this.

While they had talked, Brock's Monte horse was restless. He sidled a few steps nearer the triangle, perhaps interested in the shrub leaves, so anyone might have thought. In reality he was responding, as he'd been trained to do, to the faint pressure from one of Brock's knees.

Brock was surrounded by an almost complete circle of men. But they didn't bother to bar him from the angle in the stony wall of the hill, which rose steep and unscalable in

back of him. In the partial circle the Camerons were a couple of yards away from each other yet close enough to pistol Brock with ease, if he tried to make an escape on his weary horse.

"I repeat now what I told you at Nan's," Brock said in loud, clear tones. "I never harmed a hair of Ian's head. If you hang me, you'll have done murder yourselves. Remember that when I'm gone."

Monte moved slightly. He now stood directly opposite the crude rock triangle of the cliff.

The Camerons stared at Brock with hate, under which flared the fire of their suppressed violence. Not only had they been drinking in Hamaca, they were still drinking now and then from the silver topped flasks they always carried with them wherever they went.

"After you die may you burn for what you did to Ian," Rothsay cried, lifting his flask to his lips. "Here's hopin' Ian knows it." He took a drink from the flask. "Because you're yellow, you dirty coward—"

But Rothsay Cameron never finished his sentence. Just as he spoke, the horse on which the prisoner was seated, suddenly snorted and reared wildly, pitching the captive headlong into the bushes.

As Monte's forefeet came back to earth, Rothsay, sneering with disgust, leaped forward and seized the bridle. He pulled the horse aside, then uttered a surprised yell.

"Where's Brock?"

The prisoner had disappeared!

CHAPTER III

Hunted Man's Escape

DAZED with surprise, the Camerons crowded forward, staring about the bushes as if they could hardly believe their eyes. To them a miracle had occurred. Brock Dorn was gone!

Cursing loudly, the Camerons began a hurried search for the man they had intended to hang. Noting the torn briers and brush, they tore them aside and discovered the mouth to the hidden cave. It was Rothsay who lifted his pistol and poured a hail of lead into the mouth of the slide.

After falling from his horse, Brock had shot down the rock slide at a speed much too high for comfort but he didn't even feel the bruises he got when he hit the floor in the black darkness.

The roar of the guns left him undisturbed for there was a bend in the tunnel and he knew that the slugs would never reach him from the mouth.

He rose and moved aside. Lead spattered the rocky walls, and from above, came the curses and threats of the Camerons. Then the voice of Roderick Cameron, oldest of the five, rose over the clamor.

"He's dead. Old man Curley told me long ago that he'd found a slide somewhere here, and said it went down thousands of feet, practically bottomless. I never believed the old liar and forgot about it. Now I know it was true. I ain't sorry that Brock's death come that way. I don't like hanging. Let's be going, fellers. We got poor Ian to bury."

While Brock listened, he was working on his roped wrists. Roderick had tied them but not brutally tight. In their excitement, they'd forgotten to search him, and when Roderick had secured Brock's wrists he had failed to remember that Brock always carried a jack-knife in his hip pocket, because his side pocket was worn thin. Nan had promised to patch it but neglected to do so.

Brock managed to get the knife from his hip and easily get it open. Almost as easily he cut his ropes.

He had matches as well as his stock knife. These things he always carried. When his hands were free, he waited until he was sure the riders were gone and lighted the edge of a letter from a rodeo buyer who had wanted to buy a few show horses. The small flame showed him the chest was still there, still locked as usual.

He held the flame close to the edge of the simple fastening and noted, as he had before, that the wood was wormeaten and rotting from the damp.

He opened up the hoof-cleaner on his stock knife and with this steel tool he easily tore the lock from the wood. He threw back the chest lid and the last light from the flaming letter danced on gold pieces.

CONCERNING what might lie under the tray with the gold pieces he had no curiosity, only loathing for anything belonging to Nan. But she owed him a hundred dollars on back pay as top hand and manager. This he took, for it was rightfully his.

He closed the trunk and went toward the small exit. He squeezed himself out into daylight again and stood very still, looking and listening.

He heard the distant lowing of a bull, the scream of an eagle, no longer mocking, floating high above him. He thought of Monte, the horse he'd never see again.

He was alone, friendless and on foot, even his saddle gone! He had no horse—not even a rope. And even if he had a rope—

At this instant an unexpected sound diverted his depressing thoughts. It was the whinny of a horse, coaxing for sugar.

The sound had come from a tall leafy thicket.

Hastily Brock thrust the leaves aside and stared in astonishment at the head of the young stallion which had paused there to whinny at him.

No, it was not Monte, but Stag, another horse belonging to the ranch. Brock had turned Stag loose only that morning in the field back of the house and Stag had wandered north into the hills as he was often in the habit of doing when not confined to the corral. As Stag was very tame and always returned to the ranch at nightfall, Brock often let him roam loose when the horse was not needed for ranch work.

Once more Brock Dorn blessed his exceptional luck. He caught Stag's mane and for a moment hid his face against the stallion's powerful shoulder. Then he straightened up and leaped on Stag's back.

They took up the flight together, Brock riding bareback and guiding the horse by means of the rope halter around his head and with his knees.

Brock headed westward. It would have been simple for him to have gone to the nearby railroad which would have taken him to some city, where he could easily have lost himself in its thronged streets. But Brock was an open air man. To him the high blue sky or the rolling plain was the breath of life. Among cattle and horses he felt free, as if he could call his soul his own. He was his own master.

So he chose to keep to the open range till, far enough away to be rid of the menace of the Cameron family, he would find a job, perhaps in a rodeo where he could seek a tryout in the arena when opportunity offered. In that way he could keep the young stallion, Stag, who had won his name by jumping out of any enclosure.

So man and horse went their furtive way, stopping for food at isolated nester houses, paying in gold, horse and man sleeping in barns.

They would take new names, and begin a new life.

In a few days they passed a town where a rodeo show was holding a performance. Brock didn't think he had gone quite far enough yet, although they'd come a long distance. But he did stop on a high chaparral masked bank to watch some rodeo riders gaiting show horses on a big oval roadway, apparently a sort of parade ground for tourists.

He watched them longingly. When they raced off, he lingered, hoping another bunch of them might show up, for it wasn't morning parade time yet.

It was miles back to Hamaca, but he must ride on. His thoughts turned longingly to the rodeo grounds lying a half mile away, at Turquesa.

To his keen pleasure another group of rodeo riders did go loping past him.

He should leave, yet still lingered! If only he were one of them, thrilling to his chance with an outlaw in the chute, the gate about to be opened for the tornado under him.

He knew well the dangers of the rodeo arena, but it was danger spiced with excitement, cramming a year of living into a few seconds!

He waited, hoping to see the rodeo riders go round the oval and pass him again but they cut off into the straight road leading to Turquesa.

Maybe another bunch would come?

TWO cars passed, tourist laden. Then another car of fine make stopped just below him, and voices rose high in wrangling, a man's tenor, a girl's shrillness.

"Throw him out!"

"I won't!" the girl shrieked. "Throw yourself out!"

"You had no right to pick him up. Park regulations are against it. Hang it, look what he's—"

Behind the car, but not close, a girl in smart riding togs was trying to gait a half broken young horse. Out of his keen side vision, Brock was aware of her, but not with any pleasure, though she was both young and lovely.

Women! Nan's treachery burned hourly in his mind.

The quarrel grew louder.

"Throw him out. He bit me!"

"No, I want him!"

The car door opened. A man in rodeo outfit hurled from the driver's seat a bear cub. It struck the pavement, lay still. The door slammed shut and the man drove on.

"Needn't have hurt the poor little cub," thought Brock in disgust, and found his thought had been also that of the girl rider. She came galloping up, dismounted, trailed her reins and picked up the cub, talking to it, demanding if it were hurt.

"She needn't make a fool of herself babbling over it," thought Brock sulkily.

The cub had his own ideas. He had been more shocked than hurt. He came to and gave a bawling wail as she moved with him toward her young horse.

The nervous sorrel, at the scent and sound of the cub, shied aside like a frightened crab, then abruptly bolted, his heels winged by the sudden appearance of a she-bear in search of her cub. She was some distance behind the sorrel, but a horse sees backward to a remarkable extent.

The girl legged it after her horse, whistling and calling. She hung onto the cub, unaware of the she-bear. Up on the bank Brock wrestled with his stallion, who didn't want to plunge down the declivity, and yelled to the girl:

"Drop the cub, idiot! Drop it."

She fled on, clinging to the cub, still unaware of the pursuing dam. Soon the cub uttered an outraged high pitched bawl and the she-bear answered it with a hair raising roar of fury, coming on at a lumbering run.

The girl looked over her shoulder, screamed with terror and let go the cub. But even in her fear, Brock noticed that she checked her flight enough to set the cub down gently.

A punishing whip slash sent the young stallion crashing down the slide and into the road. If only the girl could be reached before the she-bear caught her—if only the stallion didn't go panic-loco over the bear scent! If only—

The young stallion hit the roadway, saw the she-bear and bolted, just as Brock had feared he would. If a bitted horse really bolts the bit won't stop him. A halter, such as Brock rode with, is a mere joke.

Leaning over the black's withers and along his neck, Brock shot his right hand down to the horses nose, closed his fingers over the nostrils, but not too tightly and pulled the glossy head to the right, just enough to align girl and horse together when the stallion should catch up with her.

Mute as a hare running before hounds, the girl fled on. She had lost her sombrero, the wind ruffled her long bob of thick and silky hair. She ran well in her desperation but so did the she-bear goaded on by fury. The girl knew well enough she couldn't outdistance the galloping paws that would reach and destroy her. In the bawling roar from the she-bear she didn't hear the unshod feet of the stallion.

Sick with terror she sped on, fearing the bear, and unaware of the stallion so close behind her.

KNEES clamped vicelike on his horse's shoulders, Brock swept her with a gaze as keen as that of a pouncing hawk.

Keeping his eyes on the she-bear, Brock yanked from under him the piece of blanket he had acquired to ride on from a nester. Now he flung this over the stallion's head, blinding him—the old device for controlling

[*Turn page*]

horses when a stable burns. But for this Stag, in spite of the pull on his nostrils, might shy across the highway and away from the girl, for the she-bear was close to the girl now, and just ahead.

The stallion's nose passed the girl. A split second more and Brock would be alongside her. The saddlecloth fell, but that was all right now.

Brock had his glance fixed on the broad leather belt the girl was wearing. Swooping down, he thrust his steely fingers through the belt at the back, snatched up the girl and flung her face down across the stallion in front of him. Here he held her securely, hoping that his saddleless horse wouldn't buck. Should that happen, they'd both be thrown off and the subsequent argument with the she-bear would have been all to the bear's advantage.

But the stallion didn't buck. He raced even faster. His rider glanced back over his shoulder and watched the she-bear diminish in size. After a time Stag became aware that the danger was over, for the she-bear had given up the chase, had turned back and was making for her squawling cub. The stallion slowed down and stopped.

Brock gave a sigh of relief, and looked down at the girl. The breath had been knocked out of her by the rough hasty rescue, and she was still half dazed. Now she uttered a gasp of rising fury.

"Get—me—up, you brute!"

He swung her behind him with the same rough celerity.

"Hang on," he growled.

She was now astride. She clung to him tightly.

"Keep your spurs off my horse or he'll pitch," he growled.

She was recovering from the second and jolting transfer to the rear.

"Th-think I'm a fool?"

"Know you are."

"*Know*? Why, you beast!"

"Nobody with any brains would leave her horse to pick up a bear cub," Brock said bitingly.

"How else could I know if it was dead or not?" she countered.

"Are you such a bad rider you couldn't lean from the saddle and scoop up the cub?"

"Bad rider! Why you're—you're simply abominable! And to top everything" she added bitterly, "there comes Dad. He promised to meet me here. He evidently hasn't seen my riderless horse. It must have galloped off the road."

Brock smothered what he'd like to say. Women! This fool of a schoolgirl, even at her tender age, had forced his hand. She had driven him from seclusion before he was ready, before he'd even had a chance to buy an outfit. Young or old, there was only trouble in women!

Now that she rode behind him, he'd pulled the stallion down to a walk by closing on his nostrils again and then releasing them, waiting the inevitable encounter with her father.

"Dad's all my family," she said with a touch of meekness. "Our name's Yarrow. I'm Dessa."

Brock barely heard her. How would he explain the stallion and himself to her approaching parent?

CHAPTER IV

New Friends

COLONEL JOHN YARROW, successful, respected, showed a clean-shaved broad, poker face to the world, but, as he checked beside his daughter, a flicker of annoyance showed for an instant.

"What d'you mean by inducing my daughter to ride that bridleless stallion?" he said sharply to Brock.

Before he could answer the girl cut in:

"Inducing's hardly the right word for being snatched up by your belt and thrown across a horse's withers."

Brock froze where he sat. Women and their treacheries! Here was another Nan ready with a deadly lie. This girl could end by getting him lynched. Should he sling her to the ground where she'd be safe now and race away before she could finish her sinister work?

But as Colonel Yarrow stared at him with narrowing eyes, the girl burst into a ripple of laughter and rapidly gave an accurate sketch of the whole incident.

"Perfectly ridiculous—the whole thing," she finished.

Yarrow scowled. "Perfectly stupid on your part—picking up that cub while you were afoot."

"I seem to have been told that before," she said in a sweetly resigned tone.

"You do nothing but get into trouble," her father said angrily. "Have you thanked this rider for saving you?"

She gave a little chuckle. "Why, no. He didn't follow the rules. When a man rescues a girl, he's awfully polite and—and soothing. But this man not only jolted all the breath out of me, he bawled me out afterward, inferring there was nothing in my head but empty space. This gave him so much pleasure I consider we're quits. We—"

"Give me a chance, will you?" broke in Brock deeply annoyed. "I don't want your thanks. All I want—"

"Is for me to switch over to Dad's horse. Right?"

"Right," growled Brock, reddening.

"Well, I won't switch. That gray of his pitches like fury. You and I will ride home with Dad *pronto*. What's your name, rider?"

The abrupt question startled him. He hadn't really decided on a new name. A word sprang up in his mind. "My name's Quest. Jim Quest. But I'm called—" For a moment invention flagged, then he said coolly, and quite untruthfully, "I was born near the Canada line, on the Ross River. So I'm called Ross River Slim."

"Quite an assortment of names," the girl said impudently. "We'll settle for Quest, because you must have been questing after your horse, to be using only a halter."

Brock flushed again. Women! Why couldn't she keep her mouth shut? Wasn't it bad enough that she had compelled him to identify himself at a time he believed to be premature? This was far from Hamaca—yes. But not far enough! He should have ridden at least three hundred miles. He was aware of Yarrow's quietly observant gaze, knew Yarrow had marked his change of color.

And the blasted girl wouldn't even change horses!

Grudgingly Brock admitted to himself that she had a sweet voice, and the feel of her small hands clinging to him wasn't unpleasant—but why had she been stupid enough to leave her horse and go cub-gathering? If women weren't treacherous they were idiotic, troublemakers all the way round! Yarrow's voice checked his thoughts.

"You're putting up at my ranch, Quest. It's near town and you'll want to see the rodeo that's going on now."

Brock was tired and hungry, so was his horse. He knew well enough Yarrow would be a good host. Brock thought:

"Long as I've taken the plunge, inventing a name, maybe I'll be as safe here as anywhere."

"Reckon I'll be glad of your hospitality," he said quietly.

They left the oval for a trail, short-cutting to Yarrow's home.

"My ranch is the Rodeo Rampant Seven," Yarrow said. "I've contracts for rodeo horses the country over. My son used to be my right hand. Of course a horse killed him."

"Tough," Brock said gently. The men rode on in silence.

"Rampant is a term in heraldry, meaning standing on their hind legs," explained Dessa with dignity.

BROCK, wise enough to know that every man is ignorant in some ways, was never ashamed to learn.

"What's heraldry?" he asked. "Some kind of horse medicine?"

"Records of special families, showing they had highflying forebears when Adam was a little boy, or so the heralds write it down," Dessa said solemnly.

Brock laughed. Yarrow shrugged. "The top rider in the rodeo, Shardon McIlver, doesn't laugh ancestry off," the rancher said. "He's so conceited about his ancestors that you can see him swell when he talks about them."

"Shard's conceited about everything touching himself," Dessa said. "But most of all about his pedigree."

"Every human being should stand on his own feet and not try to prop himself up with dead men!" Colonel Yarrow opined.

"But a man would like to know who his father and mother were," thought Brock bitterly. "I haven't even a name of my own. Nan didn't find a scrap of evidence concerning them. Just the two dead bodies. If only—" He pushed the useless regret from his mind.

Arriving at the R R Seven, Brock saw the signs of success everywhere. They stopped at the stable. Dessa went straight to the big ranchhouse.

The runaway saddler had preceded them and was waiting near a corral. When the horses had been cared for, Yarrow lingered, telling Brock about his spread, drawing Brock out, evidently pleased by Brock's responsive appreciation of Yarrow's management.

It was pleasant there in the alleyway. Yar-

row finally dropped the subject of his ranch.

"Shardon McIlver's bringing over a promotor he wants me to see," he said. "You've got sound intelligence, Quest, and you know horses. I'd like your opinion on this promoter Shard knows. Want you to meet him. But come over to my den."

Yarrow's den was plain and practical. He brought whisky and cigars but Brock preferred the cigarettes. When he'd had a drink and was smoking with the rancher, Yarrow continued in a friendly tone:

"Son, would you like to tell me why you came along, riding a naked stallion with a halter?"

"Not much of a tale," Brock said carelessly. "I've no folks. I been my own man since I was thirteen. I been working the last few years as tophand on a ranch but I had words with the owner recently and I quit. He owed me a hundred bucks and he paid it in gold. I took my bay gelding, outfitted, and the stallion, and headed this way. But I stayed overnight in a tough place. My bay and, what was worse, my guns was stole while I slept. I aimed to get outfitted again in Turquesa."

Yarrow nodded. "I'll do the outfitting. You grabbed my girl out of sure death, Quest." He rose, went straight to a closet and came back with a fine pair of guns, holsters and belt. He grinned. "These were presented to me, these forty-fives. They're beautifully balanced, but pearl handles are too fancy for a solemn old fellow like me. They suit your age better."

Brock took the guns eagerly.

His eyes shone as he examined their fine workmanship. He buckled on the belt and filled the holsters.

"I'm getting the feel of them."

Yarrow nodded a smiling approval, then led the way into another room and closed the door behind them.

"Quest, this was my son Tom's room," he said, a little hoarsely. "I've not known what to do with his things. I sort of feel he'd know. Now you've come in just right. You saved the sister he loved, and you're his size. Everything in this room is yours, everything you care to have. And the room's yours as long as you care to stay."

AT THE rancher's words, Brock felt moisture in his eyes.

"You—you're blamed good to me," he stammered.

"It's you who've been good to me, Quest. You saved the light of my home when you saved Dessa. She's a bit spoiled but she's got a heart of gold." He ran heavy fingers through his thick hair. "Changing the subject, but here's something about myself that may sound loco—I've got a special gift—a gift for picking good horses and good men at sight."

Brock grinned. "Then you don't need my opinion on this fellow—what's his name—Ortega—when he comes."

"I just want to see if our sizing up of him matches," Yarrow drawled. "But now I'm leaving you awhile. You'd like to wash and dress."

To have a shave, a plentiful though cold bath, to dress from head to foot in fresh clothes which fitted him pleasingly well—how wonderful! There was a full length mirror in the room. Tom Yarrow had evidently been a bit of a dandy, and Brock realized that the mirror now reflected a six-footer who was, in a rugged way, good-looking. That same six-footer showed a remarkably well turned figure. He grinned at himself, flashing strong white teeth.

Called to dinner at one o'clock, he glanced with surprise at a girl in a blue linen gown, wearing blue beads. Silk stockings followed the lines of neat ankles. It took a second look to make him believe that the school girl he had recently sworn at, was now this blue gowned, demure-looking young lady in her late teens or early twenties. He was surprised, yes, but not thrilled.

At the table, where they had coffee along with a fine dinner cooked by Quong Ho, the kitchen autocrat, Dessa presided over the cups.

As she presided, she noted that Brock's eyes were persistently turned toward her father, her demureness vanished. But she said sweetly,

"Another cup, Rider Quest?"

"Yes, ma'am, please." As he took it from her he felt their fingers touch, knew that a little flash of electricity had run up his forearm; he ignored it and went on, setting his cup and saucer down. "They say we'll drink milk and honey in heaven. I'll tote me a cup of this coffee instead."

She eyed him with a touch of gaminlike impudence.

"What makes you think you can ever get a chance at that particular place?"

"Not thinking. Just hoping," he grinned;

his bitterness toward women cleared him of all shyness.

She shrugged. "No law against hoping; even tumbleweeds may!" Then, as Yarrow scowled at her, she added hurriedly, "Of course you know the tumbleweed song. Its quite—musical. You sing?"

Brock looked at her. Did he sing? It came over him strangely that only last Monday he had ridden singing in the saddle. But that Monday was now years away. Singing went with careless happiness! A fugitive didn't crave to sing—the springs of song were dried up in him, killed by blasts of horror and treachery. Brock said quietly,

"No. I don't sing."

She threw a him a mocking little glance, "It's polite to ask me, in return, do I!"

He said with grave civility but with no personal interest, "Do you?" He missed the flash of indignation in her really beautiful eyes. Her father caught it, smiled to himself and cut in,

"Like to top a horse for me, Quest, before Shard and Ortega come?"

"Sure would!" Brock said eagerly, glad that he and Yarrow would soon go down to the corrals together and away from Dessa, for she disturbed him vaguely, deep in his mind below his surface indifference. He felt annoyed about this.

CHAPTER V

Too Wild to Tame

A FEW minutes later the two men quitted the table leaving Dessa nibbling at some toast.

"Get your guns, Quest," Yarrow said. "After Shard's gone, we'll test your marksmanship." Brock hurried upstairs after them.

The beautiful guns buckled on, Brock again stood looking at himself in the long mirror. It reflected youth, strength and cool poise.

"You are Quest," he said aloud. "The other one is forgotten. This is far enough away. You are safe."

A man may add much to the day's happiness by a little self hypnotism. The firm words brought a smile to Quest's lips.

He turned away and ran down stairs. Dessa was in the hall.

"Dad said follow him to the corrals and wait there," she said lightly.

"Thanks." He strode away, eager to prove himself a real rider, fit for the arena. He waited at the first corral. His thoughts went back to Dessa. Like most people who have lived much alone, he sometimes had the habit of expressing his thoughts aloud.

"At least she had sense enough not to follow us down here," he drawled. "Yarrow's got her trained to stay out of men's affairs."

He heard a small chuckle. Turning swiftly he saw Dessa perched on a top rail, her heels hooked into a lower rail. He reddened.

Undoubtedly this girl had come out here to see him thrown and enjoy it. Well, she was going to get fooled—the devil take her! Women!

She said with a superior air, "You been a lot by yourself, Rider Quest, or you wouldn't be elaborating your interesting cogitations aloud!"

He flushed deeper. A somewhat cracked old voice exclaimed from the barn door as old Bill Saddler appeared:

"Gosh a-mercy, Dessy! You done swallowed the dictionary?"

"That came out of my prize essay at high school," she said with a laugh. "I came across it this morning and thought I'd give *you* a chance for a new long word, you love 'em so much, Bill."

"Cogitations! What's it mean?"

"It means thinking up compliments to women," she said. Saddler eyed her with suspicion. He'd known Dessa since she was five years old and he was outraged by the way she now played with hearts in the whole section. He couldn't realize she was grown.

"It doesn't mean anything of the sort," corrected Brock coldly, addressing the old cowboy. "It's just a term for thinking—of any kind."

Dessa grinned at him impishly. "If you talk your thinking aloud—of any kind—you're apt to reveal some dark and deadly secret of your past."

He knew she jested, but the jest went home like a sword thrust! She questioned lightly,

"Don't you know, Rider Quest, that who talks to himself talks to the devil?"

Yarrow appeared from the barn and smiled happily at his daughter, then turned to Quest.

"You can top Toss'em first."

Toss'em was a hard bucker but he was

nowhere as mean a proposition as Stomper on the Red Gulch ranch. However when Yarrow whistled the time signal and Brock slid over to a hazer's horse, Yarrow was smiling and well satisfied, while, to Brock's surprise, hand-clapping came from Dessa's post.

"Rah for Quest!" she said impudently. "See you keep up your end in the rodeo because I feel obliged to bet on you, and I don't want to be cleaned out!"

BROCK turned and looked at her. "Rodeo?" he said bitterly. "I've no chance to join that. I'm just what you called me—a tumbleweed."

"Is that your chief wish, Quest?" Yarrow said. "To ride in rodeos?"

"What you want and what you get are different," Brock said stiffly.

"Not always. Will you top another?"

"Many as you like."

Two cowboys brought out a second horse, blindfolded. They stood at his head as Brock swung into the saddle. He called to them, they jerked off the blindfold and Treat'em Rough went into action, bawling and bucking while the rider grinned and sat him superbly. He was still in the saddle when Yarrow blew the time signal.

"Shard's not quite due here yet," Yarrow said. "Come over to that small corral where I've got your stallion penned. I want to give him the once over."

Leaving Dessa perched on the fence, Quest walked off without a glance at her, following Yarrow. She flushed and stared angrily after him, and ancient Bill Saddler was cynically amused as he lounged against the corral fence.

"Quest topped 'em okay, but I sort of reckon, Dessy, you done drawed one *you* can't top," he drawled.

"I don't know what you mean," she said wrathfully.

He chuckled. "You been ridin' the boys in this county high wide and handsome. Got 'em bitted and saddled, ready to take any fence under your shiny spurs. But now you've drawed a wild one you can't never tame! This feller Quest hates wimmen, I can tell the signs. He's a mysoggernist."

"Before you try to use long words, Bill, study your dictionary. You're trying to say misogynist," Dessa spoke coldly, glad she had herself encountered the seldom used term in her own dictionary while looking for something else. She pondered the term, wondering if such a person could exist. Now here was this insufferable old rider, Saddler, who said Quest was one!

It was Bill Saddler's turn to flush. He cherished an occasional long word but usually invented its pronunciation as he thought it should be. He forced an old cackle and retreated into the barn.

Dessa remained on the fence, subject to confusing feelings, chiefly exasperation. "You've drawed a wild one you can't never tame!" Well, who in the mischief wanted to tame Quest. She'd be delighted to see him ride away—for good! And when had she tamed anybody? Or wanted to?

She knew that every bachelor in the county ate out of her hand, but she was shrewd enough to remember that she was one of the county's few girls left unmarried. Though lovely, and assured of this every time she looked in her mirror, Dessa was not vain, but she wasn't twenty-one yet and the devotion of the bachelor contingent was pleasant, although at times rather a nuisance.

"A wild one you can't never tame."

She heard or thought she heard old Bill going out of the stable through the wagon yard, where buckboards and heavy wagons were kept. Good riddance of bad rubbish, the old idiot!

She slipped down from the fence and went quietly into the barn, not of course because she'd be expected to leave before Shard and his promoter rode up, but just to see if Bill had cleaned her saddle and bridle properly with her new cake of harness soap.

Like a lovely shadow Dessa slipped into one of the stalls where she, unseen herself, could get a ringside view of the interviewer. She cared nothing about the business side although she owned a quarter interest in her father's ranch, left her by her mother.

She wanted to observe how much Quest would be impressed by Shardon's fine outfit and arrogant bearing. Shardon with his business friend, Ramon Ortega, was now arriving.

SHARDON rode a really fine chestnut gelding. His saddle had cost nearly a thousand bucks. His bit chains were silver and his stirrups silver plated. His riding shirt was heavy silk with horse heads embroidered over it by one of his numerous female admirers. His belt and his filled holsters were covered with arabesques and his

sombrero had a gold wire band.

His bearing was supercilious; but that of his swarthy companion was quietly wary, overlaid with a smooth pleasantness. His outfit was plain, his guns black butted in worn black holsters.

Both men swung down from their saddles and Yarrow shook hands cordially with them. He didn't introduce Quest, leaving him a chance from the background to give the promoter a keen scrutiny.

Dessa scarcely looked at the two arrivals. Her keen young eyes were on Brock, watching how he'd react to Shard's flashing splendor and arrogant air. If a girl couldn't impress Quest, couldn't a man of Shard's position and fame do it?

She was surprised to see that Quest didn't seem to be aware of Shardon. Quest had stiffened slightly, his face was cold and hard, his eyes were narrowing as his gaze raked the Spaniard who scarcely noticed him even when Yarrow introduced Brock as a "friend of mine, Jim Quest."

Dessa thought swiftly, "Quest has seen this Ortega before, but maybe then Quest had a beard on, maybe they only met once. That Spaniard can't see anybody but Dad, trying to hypnotize Dad before they talk business. Tough assignment!"

"Quest, this is Senor Ramon Ortega," Yarrow continued. "He—"

Brock's voice, clear and hard as ice, sliced through the sentence.

"Yarrow, this Spaniard is a wet cattle runner wanted for—" But Brock's sentence, like Yarrow's, was never finished.

CHAPTER VI

The Sheriff

IN GUNPLAY, issues of life and death are packed into fractions of seconds. There was no time for surface thinking.

But what a man does in those fragments of time is conditioned usually by familiarity with his weapon and by his instinctive knowledge of his best bet under the immediate circumstances.

Not recalling Brock at once, Ortega now knew him, knew he was a fugitive, knew he could kill an escaped murderer with impunity, knew that killing him was the one way to keep Brock from denouncing him. For the supposed Ortega was himself a fugitive from a murder charge. Ortega knew Brock had recognized him and that Brock knew him as "El Lobo," originally christened Juan Perez.

Each had the same motive for blotting out the other, but in the beginning the advantage lay wholly with Brock. His had been the first recognition, and he could have drawn and killed before El Lobo could open his mouth.

But it just was not in Brock Dorn, who loved fair play, to shoot down this renegade wolf with not chance for life.

When Brock began, "Yarrow, this Spaniard is a wet cattle runner—" Yarrow grew alert, aware from the words, the slight stiffening of both men and their swiftly narrowing eyes that a gunfire showdown was likely here in the sunbaked yard. The frozen and frightened girl witness in the barn knew it also.

Everything Brock had heard about El Lobo returned to his mind, but chiefly it was the Spaniard's known boast that he always killed his victims by a slug between the eyes. Certainly here at these close quarters, a child might make such a shot successfully.

No one knew that Dessa was in the barn. She herself was too alarmed to remember she might be in the line of fire.

As El Lobo's gun jumped from its sheath with the swiftness of daily practise and flashed up into the desired aim level, Brock swerved from his hip. The sideward shoulder and head movement saved him. His own gun, blazing an instant later, got El Lobo through the heart.

Before Yarrow could draw a breath of relief, a shriek came from behind the tall stall door into which El Lobo's bullet had thudded, splintering the wood.

Brock had never heard a woman scream, for Nan was not the screaming kind, and to him the sound was horrifying. He realized, instantly, that Dessa had been behind that door, and believed, that in saving himself, he had exposed Dessa to the Spaniard's deadly fire.

Swift as Yarrow moved for the stall, Brock was quicker, tearing open the stall door with frantic fingers. There he would find the girl on the floor, white and dying!

Instead she stood erect, wide eyed. He sprang to her, supported her. "Dessa, for heaven's sake! Where are you hurt?"

"Nowhere. That bullet made such a scrunching sound I thought one of my bones had been hit. I didn't mean to scream." She shivered.

"What took you into that stall?" Yarrow roared, furious that he'd been so terrified for her. "Long as you were there and must have seen trouble coming, why the devil didn't you run back into the wagon yard? Why are you always where you shouldn't be? You scared the daylights out of me."

"Dad, darling, don't fuss! I'm still scared because that El Lobo wanted to kill somebody."

"He's dead," growled a curly and bitter voice as Shardon strode into the stall, red with anger. "I don't see why you need support, Dessa. I heard you say you aren't hurt. This man Quest—"

DESSA, about to withdraw gently from Brock's arms, didn't.

"I feel shaken and strange," she said coolly. "What's the matter with your lovely temper, Shard?"

"Enough. This Quest has spoiled a deal which would have brought me thousands. He claims poor Ortega was a wet cattle runner. Who knows?" He turned his eyes, vicious with hate, on Brock. "You were in a screeching hurry to kill him. What did he have on you?"

Irrelevant, irrational guesswork as this was, it forced back into Brock's mind the memory of those who also thought he was a cold blooded murderer. He was about to utter a fierce retort to Shard's, when Yarrow cut in.

"Don't be a fool, Shard," Yarrow said roughly. "When a man tries to stop another man's mouth with a slug, as this Spaniard did, you can be plumb sure he'd good reason to dread any revelations."

"He was a wanted man," Brock said grimly. "Your sheriff will be sure to identify him as El Lobo from posters." The word "sheriff" sent a cold chill through him. What if his own escape was now known in Hamaca? What if the local sheriff had a poster about one Brock Dorn?

A sudden feeling of loneliness made him draw Dessa closer. Shard watched them and looked murderous. Yarrow stared at the corpse.

"Daughter, go to the house and lie down a while," he said. "We've unpleasant details to look after."

Brock dropped his supporting arm. Dessa nodded acceptance of her father's order and went quickly and quietly away. She averted her eyes from the dead man as she passed him.

Shard abruptly swung up into saddle and galloped off.

Yarrow shrugged. "His eyes are quick. He saw the sheriff passing before I did. Shard'll fetch him here. But you won't have any trouble, Quest."

As Sheriff Salters, of Hamaca, approached. Brock stood waiting with folded arms, his face expressionless, the picture of composure, but inwardly he feared that cold sweat would spring to his forehead. Again he asked himself if his escape from the "bottomless" slide had been learned and his own face published on posters? No, that couldn't be. There was no photograph of him.

But there could be verbal pictures, and Nan Hames could describe him in detail, giving facial marks and features, giving so many details that no photographs would be needed.

To be indentified and then arrested would mean a quick trial and a dog's death at the hands of public executioners.

He stood by El Lobo's body as he waited. Looking down on the dark, swarthy features, the mouth on which a faint sneer seemed to linger, the living man thought there might well come a time when he could envy the Spaniard his six feet of earth.

El Lobo's death had been unexpected and mercifully swift; his own might have a long preface of scorn and contumely. Innocence, he thought with deep bitterness, of what good is it against the ruthless sickle of circumstance?

Middle-aged, bowlegged, heavy set and pleasantly blue-eyed, Salters slipped from his gray horse, grinned at Yarrow then looked steadily at Brock who returned his glance with level civility. "Salters, here's a friend of mine, Jim Quest," Yarrow said. "He shot this man in self defense. The fellow pulled first hoping to stop Quest's mouth. Quest was telling us the truth about him. Got a poster of El Lobo, Sheriff?"

Salters released Brock's gaze, and turned to the dead man, comparing him with the dirty poster he took from his pocket.

"El Lobo, all right," Salters said. He turned back to Brock. "You done the country a good service. I'm sorry there ain't no reward posted."

Vast relief ran through Brock. His escape wasn't known. He hadn't been posted.

"Don't want a reward for saving my own skin," he said quietly. "First time I ever killed a man, Sheriff. I wouldn't care for blood money."

The sheriff shrugged good-humoredly "Soldiers get pay for killing—and also medals."

NOT long after this the sheriff rode away, apparently satisfied regarding the death of El Lobo, the outlaw. Yarrow was well pleased by the way matters had worked out and, within the next few days, went to work to carry out his promises concerning Brock and the rodeo. . . .

In Rodeo land Yarrow was a man of far reaching influence due to his highly respected personality, his wealth, and the extraordinary beauty and soundness of the rodeo show horses he sold.

From the famous show horses he made his greatest profits, but he asked no mean price for the ring-devils he selected for the outlaw horse contests. Dessa didn't like these outlaw sales, but her father said dryly that men didn't tackle outlaws without knowing just what they were, and added that if you took all the danger out of life, it wouldn't be worth living.

"You didn't like it when I was in danger from that she-bear." the girl reminded him.

"Entirely different thing," her father said impatiently, and set to work on having Brock entered in the rodeo running at Turquesa. He had no trouble about this, especially as he suggested a thrilling race to be run by drivers in buckboards, each driver having a four-in-hand. Yarrow offered the prize for the winner—ten thousand dollars.

He felt sure "Jim Quest" would win it, for he had sounded Quest about his driving and had secretly tested his skill. He wanted to give Dessa's rescuer from the bear a real start in life. Yarrow, though unostentatious about it, was a very wealthy man, rich not only in money but in generous and appreciative gratitude, a rare quality.

The rodeo management took two days to advertise by print and lip the rodeo buckboard race. Meanwhile Yarrow kept his protegé out of the arena and kept him busy training for the race and its surprising purse, the largest ever offered in that section of the country. Yarrow had a secret motive in his extravagance. He expected Quest to win and so feel independent. Then Yarrow would lure him into remaining on the ranch by a partnership offer. Quest was just the kind of partner that Yarrow wanted, and meant to have, diligent, industrious, shrewd.

Yarrow allowed Dessa to watch the training. Dessa and Quest were again and again thrown together, for Yarrow had the West's recklessness about a man's pedigree. Yarrow took Quest to be just what Quest said he was because this was backed by Yarrow's own judgment of men.

Proximity with Dessa disturbed Quest, for the teasing gamin in her had suddenly disappeared. Dessa, who had played and laughed through her childhood, not half understanding the loves she roused and never shared, now stepped into womanhood and tried to please Quest in every way she knew.

But Quest hugged to himself the belief that through action, through danger and excitement. he could forget her, because indeed he must. As a hunted man he had no right to love.

Brock's dream in boyhood, had been a chance to win fame in the rodeo. Now the ambition revived with a swiftness that he found astonishing.

Accordingly, a few days later, he was in the rodeo parade, moving down the main street of Turquesa, viewing the eager pleasure of the crowds lining the sidewalks.

Brock Dorn had a priceless gift. He could, for a time at least, close one door securely and open another wide. So, as he rode, he mentally dismissed the treacheries of Losset and Nan, and became, in truth, "Ross River Slim." At the moment he was no hunted fugitive but an accepted rider with the thrilling chance ahead of winning fame.

The horse he rode so happily was a splendid cream. Brock's strong thighs fitted smoothly to its sides and the balls of his booted feet barely touched the stirrup.

THE gay band, the town overflowing with eager spectators, the sunshine, the cheers for the riders who would soon prove themselves—this was the perfect preface to the fame he longed for, the rodeo life he hoped to follow indefinitely, the chosen thrill and excitement so long denied!

He looked straight ahead. But when a thrown rose fell on his saddle-horn, his keen sight saw it in time to catch it up. His head turned a little and he saw Dessa's smiling face and knew she had tossed the

flower. It surprised and annoyed him to find her tribute had given him a touch of pleasure, he who cared nothing for girls' approval. It was wresting recognition from spectators that counted.

Parade over, Brock dropped into the first restaurant that came handy, the Jaguar's Paw, and ordered a solitary lunch, wanting to be alone so that he could enchant his mind with thoughts of the rodeo arena. But he wasn't alone long.

There were two chairs, and a broad-faced, heavily built man, in jeans and calfskin vest took the chair opposite to that of Brock. He ordered food and when the waitress went off, nodded.

"Howdy, Ross River Slim," he said. "Reckon you'd done made friends with a special friend of mine, Shard McIlver. I'm Hasper. You got another 'quaintance I don't keer for, old man Yarrow. The doddering fool wouldn't take me on because he said my mug was pre-predatory. He thinks his snap judgments are surefire, the old gourdhead!"

Brock looked coldly into hard round eyes which were the finishing touch to an oddly malevolent countenance.

"Yarrow is my friend and my boss," Brock said levelly. "Lay off him."

"Okay. I believe in friendship. You've got the wrong boar by the ear, but that's not my funeral."

Too inwardly excited and happy to eat much, Brock soon rose and, after what seemed to him a prefacing age, he was hanging above the fourlegged fury biding his time below. Then the announcer called out:

"Watch Chute Four. Ross River Slim on Hell's Own!"

CHAPTER VII
Skill and Daring

HELL'S OWN hurled his great pied body into the arena. He'd been sold as a horse nearly impossible to ride, but not a killer. He'd always been satisfied when he had thrown his rider.

Experience however, often changes the viewpoints of men. Little as most realize it, experience changes horses as well, in viewpoint as well as ability.

Hell's Own had started out as an irritated bucker, feeling toward men as he did toward horseflies. But as better and better riders tackled his gift of high, wide and handsome pitching, he began to feel hate of the human creatures forking him, slow hate at first accelerated until today the instinct of the wild, the self protective killer instinct, rose in the horse's brain and filled it. Let him but get this man thrown and he would stamp the rider.

The horse pitched, sunfished, whirled without warning, threatened to fall backward, jumped forward into mad bucking, squealing with fury. His whole body sweated hate and the desire to stamp his man.

Dessa occupied a ringside seat near her father. She was so apparently unexcited that Yarrow was rather annoyed.

"She'd not care if Quest came to grief," he thought.

But Dessa was frozen with fright for fear "Quest" was indeed in great danger. The moments that make up the minutes a rider must stay with an outlaw can seem endless to an onlooker who cares, for they are horribly long. And Dessa suddenly knew how much she cared, knew she would give anything she had to see the contest over and Quest safe.

"I've seen that horse in action before," Yarrow muttered. "He wasn't a killer but danged if he don't have the air of one now. Those high pitched squeals sound sort of murderous. I wish the whistle would blow. Ah, there it goes. Quest rode him out, but he's still pitching and the danged hazers are slow today. Oh-oh!"

The words were wrung from him as Brock's girth broke and the rider was thrown with the saddle.

Before the dilatory hazers could approach, Brock saw, hanging above him where he lay, the armed hoofs of the killer, poised for the swift drop on the rider's face. Between those hoofs and below them the bent head of the killer and the bloodshot eyes, glaring down like a hawk ready to strike.

Dessa tried to scream, her cry was only a gasp.

It was too late for the hazers now, she knew, and too late for the man to roll away. But in that deadly moment Brock Dorn jackknifed himself, and vanished headforemost—under the horse's belly.

Dazed by the disappearance, the killer, still poised, looked down where the man had been. And while he looked, the vanished rider slipped free between his straddled

hindlegs, disappearing again between the tardy hazers just arriving.

The crowd rocked the air with cheers for the ready-witted rider. Laughter came also from those close enough to see the stupidly astounded expression of the horse who never did realize just how his prey escaped him!

Hell's Own was hurried out to make room for the next contest.

Brock, being in only the outlaw contest today, had the privilege of watching the rest of the rodeo from a reserved seat between Yarrow and his daughter.

It was a big and gripping show. Brock's pulse heightened as he reveled in the knowledge that in two days he'd be one of the contestants in the very unusual four-in-hand buckboard race.

"Can hardly wait for it," he said to Yarrow.

"You'll have heavy competition, Quest, especially from Shard," Yarrow said rather grimly. He lowered his deep bass. "Shard's not only a top rein handler, he's a devil for taking risks, some of 'em none too legitimate. Mind he doesn't lock wheels with you, if you are passing him."

IN SPITE of Yarrow's lowered tone, Dessa caught what he said.

"Shard wouldn't do such a rotten thing," she said impatiently, across Brock. "You ought to be ashamed, Dad."

Brock wondered why he should feel annoyed by her quick defense of Shard. After all, she might be Shard's fiancée. This thought, intended to be a cold and logical conclusion of no importance, annoyed him still more. He forced his attention back to the wild bulldogging which was holding the audience in suspense. Shard threw a heavy steer in record time, and Dessa applauded the feat loudly.

She turned to Brock with an unexpected and sweet shyness of look and tone. "Wasn't Shard wonderful?"

Brock answered with generous promptitude, "Best piece of steer wrestling I ever saw." An irresistible impulse drove him to ask in a lowered voice. "You engaged to him?"

She turned toward the questioner. "I did tell Shard I'd think about it," she said softly. "But thinking's no use. I—don't love him."

The assertion sent a tide of pleasure through Brock. But why? he asked himself fiercely. What had any girl's decision to do with him? Marriage was not for hunted men such as he. Nan and Losset had seen to that

All through the next day, Brock bore with Yarrow's alleged "training" in handling the ribbons, for Brock could have taught Yarrow many fine points in the art. In Brock Dorn's isolated life on Red Gulch ranch his only out of doors pleasure there had been the horses. Merely for delight in his own skill he had driven four-in-hands, and even tandems, after supplies.

Indoors at night he had a resource on which Losset Hames had looked with unmitigated contempt, reading. Because Nan had once been a country schoolteacher and had wanted him, later on, to keep her accounts and mark off the tallies carefully, had taught him the three Rs. When he was twelve years old, an old woman in Hamaca had given Brock her dead husband's books, before going East to live. Among the books was a dictionary, so he had obtained a key to the meaning of many words.

But now the glittering enchantment of the rodeo arena was on him, and he was not only reading about happy adventure, but about to take part in the cream of it.

Dessa told him she and her father would be eagerly watching the race. None of the drivers would be in the other contests.

And so when the stirring hour came, she and Yarrow were there, slipping into their seats at just the right moment, reserved seats or they'd have had none, so packed were the tiers of impatient spectators.

Dessa's hand caught her father's. "Oh, they're coming in, this very minute!" she cried.

One after another there swept into the wide arena three beautiful buckboard four-in-hand teams. There were four whites, a quartet of blacks, and four shining sorrels.

Each of the leaders had a cowboy running beside him and holding to the bit, the management being anxious to waste no time getting an even start at the signal.

The men had already drawn for starting positions. Shardon was on the inside, next to Jim. Quest or, as he was billed, "Ross River Slim," and then came Larry Silcox, a well known cowboy in the rodeo.

Seats had been taken from the buckboards. The drivers stood erect. Each buckboard had a whip stock and whip, but certainly none of these fretting horses needed any lash toward running. All of them were ready, not only to run, but to bolt, if they got a chance.

Now indeed Brock felt the intoxication of the arena even more deeply than when on the back of a plunging outlaw. His feet slightly apart, his lithe, muscular body finely balanced, a fierce, exciting delight played through him. He and his splendid team seemed to him one entity. He felt their electric power play along the reins in his strong fingers, knew that in their turn they felt his.

ALMOST it seemed that the big crowd of watchers also felt it, for they cheered Ross River Slim by name, liking his poise and the unfeigned vivid delight that shone in his face.

"Quest's a favorite already," Yarrow said to Dessa sitting beside him. "I'm betting he'll win!"

"I like this better than outlaws trying to kill men," she said contentedly. "There can't be any danger in mere racing."

Yarrow shot her a sideward glance but held his tongue.

"Magnificent horses," he said. "Ought to be."

She laughed. "Yes, because they were bred on our ranch." She leaned forward excitedly. "Now they're in line. The whole thing's like a great painting, Dad. I wish they could stay like that forever."

"But I don't!" he answered. "I want a run for my money. There goes the signal. They're off to a faultless start."

Each four-in-hand jumped into a run. These were not Goshen trotters, they were greyhounds in horse form and the harness meant nothing to them; as to the buckboards, they scarcely knew the buckboards were there. The only restraint they felt was the skilled handling of the reins, the reins that said, "Obey! I am here!"

In spite of Shard's inside position, Silcox's blacks, through a fierce burst of speed took the lead and kept it over the first lap. Shard and Brock, slightly in Silcox's rear, ran nearly neck and neck.

But Silcox's blacks could not hold their scorching rush. Inch by inch they lost it until there was the amazing sight of twelve magnificent horses running in a beautiful alignment of equal speed, sleek heads outstretched, manes flowing backward in a silken tide of tossing motion, forelegs lifting in the indescribably fascinating curves of the running horse.

Brief as this astonishing equality was it agitated the bettors among the spectators. Each bettor wanted his own choice ahead, only those who weren't betting enjoyed the gorgeous and unforgettable picture of the horses, the lithe, poised youth of the drivers as they stood erect with no support but the little they permitted themselves from the reins.

Then Shard's whites began to gain. Inch by inch they drew ahead. Shard's backers yelled and stamped with delight. Now he reached a ten-foot lead.

Dessa's eyes filled with tears. Yarrow looked grim. Then Dessa gasped.

"Quest is coming up, Dad. Look, oh look!"

"What else would I be doing?" growled her father but his eyes danced with satisfaction.

"Dad, Quest is gaining so fast he's bound to get the lead! I saw Shard look back at him. Shard's nervous."

"If only Shard doesn't lock wheels when he finds he's going to be passed. He may have special strengthening in his own wheels. May think he can risk—" He broke off to add a minute later, "No, by gun! He's let Quest go by!"

"Of course. Oh, this is why I like this racing so much better than outlaw riding. The race isn't only beautiful, it's safe!"

CHAPTER VIII

Strange Peril

OUTSIDE the arena, away from the chutes, unobserved by anyone except a man close by it, something waited—something that hadn't the muscular strength of any of the men, much less any of the horses.

But it is not always strength which is relative to power. Certain things, certain unimpressive creatures, may have enormous power, destructive perhaps, if they become relative to suddenly occurring circumstances. Any real study of life shows us that.

The live something that waited wasn't yet relative to certain circumstances. Also time issues were involved—or would be—and were not yet.

The something that waited, a red dog, intelligent and obedient, suddenly quivered because he felt his master quiver. The dog made no sound, but his hackles rose slightly,

his eyes seemed to widen.

The dog crouched near to an arena exit door. A man's hand was in his collar. The man opened the exit door on a crack, his gaze leaped to the three four-in-hand buckboards sweeping around the north bend.

The dog's owner felt certain about the timing. Now he bent close to the red dog's ears and gave a curt command.

The dog ran like a red streak into the arena. He was slightly ahead of Brock's running leaders, so he made perfect connection with them, raced alongside at remarkable speed. Just a dog!

But from his thickly haired body came the reeking scent, the fresh, plentiful scent, of the blood in which his coat had been soaked, sponged from a pail of blood.

He had ceased to be a mere dog. He had become, to any horse, a bearer of horror and a promise of more horrors to come. He had now the power to plant a single idea in every horse's terrified brain the instant its nostril caught this taint of bloody death, the idea of springing away, aside, anywhere—and *now!*

Man has been what he calls civilized so long that few know what the scent of blood is like, though the stockyards shed it in rivers for his benefit. But to the horse, as to cattle, it screams a nerve-shaking warning of impending and dreadful danger.

In the scent of blood the wolf leaps and the mountain lion strikes and slays.

The wide, keen and fastidious nostrils of Brock's sorrel leaders instantly picked up the abhorrent and, to them, warning scent. They stopped, almost sitting on their haunches, reared frantically, pivoted on their hind feet and plunged sideward, away from the dog, carrying with them the wheelers, now getting the scent too.

In their desperate effort to escape the blood-soaked nightmare animal, they cut the buckboard too far, turning it swiftly over.

Had the timing of the dog's owner been just a little more judicious, Shardon's team would have swept on to victory because Silcox's blacks were well in the rear, but that judiciousness would have meant waiting until the racing teams made another circuit. The time issue was a hard thing to figure precisely—and the red dog's owner had failed in his estimate.

As it was, the glossy sorrels plunged straight into the onrushing whites of Shardon, the sorrels and whites became a tangled, rolling, struggling mass.

The red dog whirled round, went past them and down the arena toward the coming blacks. Seeing the tangle ahead, getting the bloodscent, the black quartet bolted, completely out of hand, but they showed a remnant of intelligence by dashing for the main entrance, which was open. Through this they went headlong, vanishing with their driver who could only stay with them.

SHOCKED into silence, like the other spectators, Dessa sat frozen, unaware of anything in existence except that dreadful drama below, that frantic mix-up of kicking, rolling horses, the overturned buckboards. Yarrow's voice rang in her ears.

"Quest was flung into that mess of horses," he said. "Quest must be down under them and dead. Don't understand how just a dog —There's Shard getting up off his buckboard floor. He's pulled a sleeve gun. What the dickens! He's shot the dog. The fool! Now we can never—"

"There's Quest," gasped Dessa. "He's at the horses, trying to save his leaders. He can't be badly hurt. There comes help. How

[*Turn page*]

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign
Of Tired Kidneys

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. *(Adv.)*

slow the hazers have been."

"Glad to see Quest alive," growled Yarrow. "I want that boy. He could take Tom's place."

The voice of the announcer silenced them: "The drivers are unhurt, except for bruises. There will no further racing today, friends. But at another performance this race will be run again. Some devil, some hater of horses, turned a dog into the arena.

"This dog had been soaked in blood. Nothing better could be devised to run horses completely loco. We regret that one of the contestants shot the dog, else the animal would have been a great help in tracking down his miscreant master. But this master will certainly be caught, eventually.

"The same three contestants will race again later in the week, and your bets will then be decided."

"One of the contestants shot the dog." But had Shardon a particular reason for killing the animal, wondered the listening Brock? Had Shardon kept it shrewdly, killing the animal to protect whoever had given it commands which it was only too ready to obey?

If the dog had lived, it might easily have been successfully used in deciding the owner. Was that owner in Shardon's pay? Was he supposed to ruin Brock's sorrels with a good chance of killing Brock?

Had the plan failed merely because the releaser of the dog hadn't been sufficiently intelligent about the timing? What was Shardon's incentive, if he really had wanted Brock and his winning team destroyed? Was the dog to be released only in case Brock was winning, the motive being the ten thousand dollar purse—and that only?

Or was Shardon's incentive, if he were mixed up in this, not the purse but hate of Brock?

That Shardon McIlver had conceived a deep hate for him on account of the Ortega incident, Brock thought likely.

Brock had not seen the world, but he had been enough in the cattletown of Hamaca to learn that hate rivals love in its ability to be born at a single meeting. He had seen for himself in Hamaca that the fruit of such instant hates may be death.

Unjust indeed to hate Brock because Shardon had been disappointed in a promised chance for money in a deal.

Unjust, yes, but hate, like love, takes no count of justice!

If the dog incident was born out of Shard's hate, then he was certainly an enemy to be watched. On the other hand there was no proof that Shard had anything to do with the dog's release.

Speculations on the matter got Brock nowhere, for although the law bustled about, and hunted clues, none was found. The red dog had had his disastrous day, and that was that!

One of the sorrels had to be shot, one was badly lamed. Two blacks were injured, they wouldn't be useful for weeks.

The management would depend on Yarrow to produce other and equally suitable horses for the four-in-hand race when the three contestants tried again later in the week.

MEANTIME Brock was happy. He'd often heard it said that any fugitive who took a new name and went boldly into public life was safer than he'd be, drifting from hideout to hideout. He had an additional safeguard in the fact that few people had ever seen him clean-shaven. He'd looked so young at Red Gulch ranch that he'd worn a short beard which had aged his face considerably.

Now he went clean-shaven.

Next morning he was in Turquesa early, buying some small supplies in a general hardware when, to his surprise, Shard not only followed him in, but drew him aside as soon as Brock had finished buying, leaving the package to be called for.

"Quest, I didn't act right to you about Ortega," Shard said in frank tones. "Instead of thinking about my financial disappointment, I should have been thankful you liquidated the scoundrel. If you hadn't been there I might have been tangled up in something raw that I'd have been jailed for. Reckon you don't bear malice?"

"No."

"They say the best way to show friendship is to ask a favor. Since we've plenty time before parade, I'm asking you one,"

Brock looked at him keenly but Shardon met his eyes with pleasant steadiness.

"What is it you want?" Brock asked him slowly.

"Hasper told me he met you the other day; liked you. He isn't much to look at, but he's twice saved my life. The fool thinks he knows about ore and yesterday he went up on the side of Gotch Mountain prospecting, or what he calls prospecting. He hasn't turned up

again. He was drinking some. I know that side, been over every foot. It was cut by one of these mountain rivers—the devil knows how long ago.

"The water sank, vanished for always, but not before it ground out more'n one of those pot holes mountain rivers make. If Hasper was drunk enough he could have fallen into one of these, specially the one they call the Devil's Ladle. Thought you might help me with a look-see up there."

Having suffered bitterly himself from unjust suspicions, Brock felt ashamed that he had deeply distrusted Shard on two circumstancial grounds. Shard's anger about Ortega's killing and Shard's shooting the red dog so swiftly, cutting off the chance of identifying the master through the dog.

Throwing off his distrust Brock agreed to spend two or three hours on the slopes of the sullen old mountain looming near Turquesa.

Part of the way they rode, but the nearer they drew to the potholes the rougher the going. Finally they left the horses and advanced on foot.

Both men were armed. The guns were heavy but not nearly so unpleasant as their polished high heeled boots.

By the time they came in sight of the handle of the Devil's Ladle, both men had blisters on their heels.

Brock was slightly behind. He had stepped into a nest of briars and was trying to get free without scratching his boots any more than he could help, when a cry of grief from Shard on the edge of the Devil's Ladle sent Brock hurrying to him.

The pit was ground out of soft stone, and so it was unusually large for a pot hole and it had sheer walls, a rough and broken floor. On that floor Brock saw a man sprawled, face up.

"I've lost the one real friend I had," Shard said in broken tones. Then in an eager and excited voice, "But wait. Aren't the fingers on his right hand moving? Look, Quest! Your eyes are keener than mine. Don't they move a little?"

So Shard did have one good trait at least —love for a friend! This thought flashed through Brock Dorn's mind as he leaned a little over the pit, staring keenly down at the inert fingers.

Instantly a fierce thrust in his back sent him headlong downwards.

He fell sprawling on the dead man, whose body broke the fall.

CHAPTER IX

Trapped

BROCK leaped up, a flame of rage shooting through his veins. As he came up he drew, his target Shard, who sat on the pothole wall grinning derisively and kicking his heels with enjoyment against the rock back of them.

"Trigger finger itch." Shard taunted. "Try firing! Both your guns are fixed, Quest. Hasper did it for me while you were in the rodeo. Easy enough. No powder in your cartridges. Sand."

Brock struggled to control his anger. He didn't believe this incident could be deadly. Shard hadn't sufficient incentive for that.

"Rough joke, Shard," Brock said, coldly.

Shard sneered. "Hasper didn't find it a joke when *he* hit the rock down there. He'd had a devil of a good time bleeding me white under threats of making my secret public if I didn't come across!"

"So you trapped him here same way you did me," Brock said slowly. Brock's keen intelligence was ranging, ranging in search of why he should be bracketed with Hasper as a target for revenge. Surely not because of Ortega's death! Was it jealousy about Dessa?

"Shard, why have you classed me with a blackmailer as a subject for revenge?" he asked, holstering his gun. "If you'll tell me everything back of this attack, I can clear it up to your satisfaction."

"Very clever. I'll give you all the details you want, even how Hasper groveled and begged and promised, the fool. As though I'd ever believe his promises again. I listened and laughed at him and shot him."

"All right! That's that. Now why have you trapped *me?*"

"As if you didn't know why!" Shardon's eyes narrowed with hate.

"Go on, tell me. There's some bad mistake here!"

"No mistake. It's my ruin or yours. When Hasper was dying down there in the pothole, I thought, 'Now my secret's really safe.' But while he was dying he taunted me. He told me he'd told you all about how I hired him and his red dog to spoil the race for you. He was to have five hundred dollars out of

the prize money. He didn't get his timing right, as you know, and I lost the race and nearly got killed.

"Of course I shot the dog which was bound to return to Hasper if it lived because it was crazy about him. Also as you doubtless know, we quarreled. I realized then how dangerous Hasper was to me because I'd no cash to buy him off."

"Hasper never said a word to me about you or the dog. I never saw Hasper but once. That was a casual encounter in a restaurant."

"That's a stupid lie, Quest," snapped his captor. "With his last breath, Hasper told me he'd be revenged through you."

"You murderous fool," Brock said bitterly, staring up at Shard, "Hasper lied to you!"

"Dying men don't lie."

"That one did!"

"Naturally you'd say that." Shard's voice was derisive. "You're finished, Quest. If I let you live, you'd spill the whole story. Hasper told me he had furnished you with full proof. He told you he was afraid I'd get him and if I did, you were to tell everything, cough up the proofs he'd given you. Therefore you held my ruin in your hands, Quest, with the rodeo and with Dessa. I knew you hadn't told Dessa yet, by her manner to me. Of course so far you've told no one. You were just chuckling and waiting for what you considered the top moment. But I've got a brain, Quest, and resource!"

Brock was appalled by the abyss opening under him.

Hasper had shown a diabolical ingenuity in his dying moments in planning to have Quest shoot it out with Shard, or possibly ambush Shard, but he had reckoned without Shard's desperation, ingenuity and self-love. All Hasper had done was to destroy Quest.

"I'll give you my oath, Shard, that I'll never mention you nor any affair of yours—if you'll let me live," Brock said slowly.

SHARD laughed. "I don't trust any man, and I've hated you since I first saw you. Devil take your oath, and you. Speaking of the Devil, have you noticed there's a big crack in the floor down there? It's bottomless."

Brock had noticed it. He walked over to it, picked up one of the numerous pebbles scattered around and dropped it in. The elapsing time before he heard it hit told him the drop really meant death to any living thing. Here was no fancied depth, like the rock slide, but grim reality.

He hadn't tested his guns for fear of provoking Shard into firing, but now he did try both, aiming them down the fissure. Only a dull click responded, and Shard's sneering laughter.

"If those guns hadn't been fixed your slugs would have gone plumb down and hit the devil!"

Brock holstered his guns and came back to where he'd been standing. "You believe in Hell, Shard?"

"No. The only hell that comes to a man is when he don't protect himself. As I tried to do with Hasper's idea about his red dog. I would have paid him high, but he made a mess of it and lost me the purse, the clumsy idiot!"

Brock glanced beyond and behind Shard. An oak tree rose there, thickly leaved. Brock's glance had been attracted by a vulture. With the lazy insolence of its kind it was lighting in the oak, almost disappearing in the leaves. No doubt it had been about to settle on Hasper before they came up, had flown at their coming but being very hungry had returned to wait near what it desired.

Brock's mind had closed against any belief in his own death. He considered one idea after another, then stopped at a possibility. He frowned and rubbed his temples.

Shard said. "I wanted you to know you hadn't fooled me about Hasper not telling you. You grinned to yourself when you denied it—" He broke off to ask, "Why're you rubbing your forehead?"

"My head aches from that fall," Brock said angrily, but his hand at his forehead sheltered the fact that his gaze was sweeping the pothole floor for some missile. What he needed he now saw lying almost at his feet, a smooth stone that would about fit the palm of his hand.

In his boyhood he had killed jackrabbits more than once with his surefire throwing, but if he reached for this stone, in full view of Shard, he'd be drilled before he could straighten up. It had to be ruse against ruse.

"It's more than a headache," he added bitterly. "I feel dizzy."

Shard grinned viciously. "I'll stop both your dizziness and your headache before long, but after I fire I must get away from here pronto. You can never tell who might be in earshot of a gun."

Brock reeled, swore, and sat down with

some violence. His right hand apparently supported him. Under its palm was the stone. With his left he made queer scrabbling motions that fixed Shard's attention on that side.

When Brock slowly and dizzily got to his feet again, the rock was in his right hand pocket.

With apparent effort, he stood erect once more, still complaining of the dizzy feeling. Shard watched him in malevolent satisfaction. Beyond and above Shard the vulture was still in the tree, his dark coat showing through the leaves.

"When you're dead, I've got a double lasso," Shard said. "I'll come down it and send you and Hasper through the fissure. Then I'll climb back and see about your horse. I plan to—" He broke off staring.

FOR a look of sudden triumph had transformed Brock's face. His voice rang out, "You're covered from the tree! You're a dead man!"

His tones caused the startled Shard to turn toward the tree, the more swiftly because he knew his prisoner couldn't escape. He saw the dark body of the bird, and took it for the shoulder of someone's coat. There was too much at stake to hesitate. Shard fired.

The vulture tumbled to the ground—dead.

As the bullet struck the big bird, Brock's stone took Shard in the back of his head. Brock saw his enemy collapse, and to Brock, now, nothing of Shard was visible, except his legs that still dangled over the pit edge.

Was Shard dead? Maybe, but not likely. Most probably he was stunned and would recover—to grow even more vicious, if that were possible.

Taking off his belt and emptying his holsters, Brock added strips torn from his shirt; this gave him a crude rope.

Easily enough he lassoed one of Shard's booted feet, swung back on his lasso and pulled Shard down. Whether the fall killed him or not Brock was in no mood to care. Perhaps Shard was dead already.

Shard struck the flooring hard, lying limp, inert, but not dead.

Brock straightened him out, found plenty of life in his pulse and eyed him savagely. Temporarily Brock had saved his own life, but whether the eventuality would be starvation, who could say? He was sorry Shard was alive but there was nothing to do but let him live.

Brock discarded his own gun outfit for Shard's. He searched Shard for a knife but found none.

Shard had a dozen cartridges beside those in his guns. Brock decided to fire a distress signal every hour until all of the cartridges were gone.

Hour after hour passed. The store of cartridges diminished but no sign of aid appeared, neither did Shard recover consciousness although he breathed steadily and carried a good pulse.

Above, from the cloudless blue, sunshine poured down into the sullen pothole. Brock grew thirstier with each hour, more thirsty than hungry though he craved something to eat. He wouldn't look at the sandwich in his coat pocket, he would save that until he began to feel weak.

Other creatures beside Brock waited, two vultures now perched in the tree where the first one had been. They were on a dead limb and their searching, loathsome gaze watched the pit where it seemed a dead creature lay. They also craved food.

Brock had felt kindly toward the first vulture, it had unconsciously done him great service, but he hated these new arrivals and felt like shooting them—but he couldn't waste his signaling cartridges in gratifying such an impulse. He pushed away from his thoughts images of these carrion birds down in the pit after he became helpless. What nonsense! He was going to get out of here! He fired another distress signal.

Dusk deepened into night. Cold stars, like evil glittering spear points, shone out and a chill change made Brock button his coat.

He decided not to waste distress signals at night, for he had mighty few cartridges left. He would sleep.

A good theory, sleep. But soft oblivion wouldn't come. His body was in prison, but his mind ranged furiously over past happenings.

When dawn broke, he rose from the rocky floor without having had a snatch of sleep. He looked Shard over. The rider seemed just the same.

Hunger was clawing at Brock but his strength was undiminished and he wouldn't yet eat his precious sandwich. It was near nine before he fired another distress signal.

By twelve the sun had warmed up the pit, unpleasantly to Brock. But when he turned

to look at Shard again he saw that a rattlesnake was crawling very slowly over Shard's body.

The snake had just issued from a wall crack near the flooring and the slightest move on Shard's part would stir the rattler into fanging him. An effort on Brock's part to kill the snake would have brought about the same result.

"The devil will care for his own," thought Brock and waited. The musky smell of the snake rose hatefully in his nostrils and it was coming straight toward him. He hated the whole snake tribe. When the reptile was a yard from Shard's body and coming fast, Brock smacked an empty gun at its head and killed it.

He could, he reflected with a shudder, eat the snake if he had to, for it had been done often enough in parts of the West by starving frontiersmen.

He kicked the still writhing body aside and fired his last signal. This took his final cartridge. He could, he felt, handle Shard with bare hands if he came to and gave any trouble. Brock now hated him so savagely that he actually hoped Shard would give trouble.

"Nice companions," Brock growled to himself. "One dead snake and one live one."

CHAPTER X

Distrust

SHARD stirred, groaned, sat up. He rubbed his aching head, stared in confusion around the pothole.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Trouble," Brock said grimly. "Trouble of your special making!"

Shard lurched up and stood leaning against the rock wall, striving for clear remembrance. In a few seconds memory came back to him with a rush. Brock had tricked him into turning his head, then had come a blackout.

"You got me with a stone?" he said thickly.

"Of course."

"And pulled me down with a made-up rope!"

"Obviously."

"Why didn't you murder me while I was unconscious?"

Brock eyed him contemptuously, not answering.

Shard reddened. "Maybe you've only postponed it till I was conscious."

"I've got a bullet ready for you," Brock said savagely but untruthfully. "If you try any more treachery. Otherwise you can live as long as slow starvation will let you. I've fired all the cartridges but one in distress signals but I haven't been heard."

"You mean we may starve here?"

"You picked this place for its isolation, you murderous fool," Brock said bitterly. "What's to hinder us from dying here, by inches?"

Shard sat down on the rocky floor, buried his face in his hands and groaned, then lifted a terror-stricken countenance to Brock.

"Quest, I can't bear this! I'll go mad."

"Do so, and I'll plug you for being hydrophobic. I don't cotton to mad dogs!"

Shard staggered erect. "Can't you think of some way out?"

Brock shrugged. He took out his handkerchief. A small waxed package came with it. He returned the package to his pocket.

"You've got a sandwich!" Shard said eagerly.

"Yes."

"I'll buy it from you. I'll give you five hundred dollars for it."

"You stupid piece of greed. What's money to us down here?"

Shard lifted his hands to his head. "This pain is awful."

"After you've starved till you've fainted, you won't mind the pain," Brock said indifferently. "Of course there *is* a way out, for both of us."

Shard dropped his hands. "What d'you mean? Talk!"

"There is a way to escape, and a mighty big obstacle to it. Can't your wooden head work that out?"

Shard rubbed his agonizing head. "No. By gosh, I can't think for pain. What you mean, Brock? Tell me!"

"One of us, standing on the other's shoulders, can reach that edge, swing up and be free," Brock said drily. "Then he can rescue the fellow he stood on."

Shard almost forgot his head. "Of course, of course. I thought the wall was too high for that but I'll bet you're right. Let's get about it."

"The obstacle remains," Brock said more drily yet. "Who's to be the top one?"

SHARD stared. His face was without expression but into his eyes came an unconcealable fire of fresh hate. He spoke silkily, unaware he was betraying himself.

"Brock, I'm sorry for everything I've done. I was in despair, driven into it."

"Skip the lies. They're plumb wasted. You're going to be my ladder. Soon as I can, I'll come back with a rope and get you out."

"Like fun you would," snarled Shard, his upper lip lifting in a wolf snarl. "So that's why you didn't murder me while I lay helpless! I was to be your ladder—your way out, blast you! Think I don't know that you'd never come back?"

Brock shrugged, eyeing him with bitter contempt.

"You think it isn't possible for a man to keep his word?" he asked.

"He'll never keep it when breaking it is so much to his advantage, when he can get away with the breaking," snapped Shard.

"If I swore to you I'd come back and pull you out, I'd just be lying?"

"Of course. Even if I promised you a big reward in cash, you'd not come. You care nothing for money."

"I'd sure be a fool to save you in hopes of a reward which you'd never pay, Shard." Brock laughed. It was cold, ironic laughter. "Here's a lovely situation, honest. Co-operation by trusting friends! It's strange."

Shard clasped his throbbing temples. "You've gone loco to laugh at this trap we're in." He stared wildly at the sheer walls of the big pot hole, looked up at the indifferent sky. His glance was caught, held for a moment by two vultures, death's symbols, idling up there with malignant, patient purpose.

Shard thought hard.

Without seeming to do so, Brock watched him closely. He felt an ironic certainty that he'd guessed correctly the idea and plan forming in Shard's crooked mind. Time would show.

Presently Shard turned to him. "I reckon I've been unjust to you, Quest. I'm trusting you. I'll be the ladder and you can pull me up soon as you can get your rope."

"Very sensible," Brock said evenly.

In less than three minutes he was neatly balanced on Shard's powerful shoulders. Brock reached for the edge. As he lifted his hands, but before he could touch the edge, Shard whirled away from the wall, carrying Brock with him, trying to throw him.

Brock had foreseen this. He came down, but astride of Shard's neck. They both fell, hit the flooring hard, and rolled apart. Both leaped up, but now Shard had the gun from Brock's holster. Shard covered his companion.

"Now I've got you," panted Shard. "Now you'll cringe and obey. Now I'll be top man or you'll be buzzard food. Throw me that sandwich!"

Brock yawned, then grinned. "No slug in the gun, pal. Try firing."

In an access of doubt and fury that swept everything before it, Shard fired directly at him. Only a click answered and he dashed the gun down. Strung to a frantic emotional pitch, convinced Brock would never return to rescue him, Shard felt he'd but one outlet left for the desperation boiling through him. He would kill Brock and take a chance on eventual rescue.

Not for a second did he believe Brock would come back and save him. Brock would leave him to rot there with Hasper. But with Brock dead, he, Shard, would have the sandwich. And there was a half formed hideous thought in the back of Shard's mind that Brock's body would, at worst, keep him alive until the circling buzzards drew someone's attention.

HE STARED at Brock with bloodshot eyes of hate. Brock laughed, bitter, ironic, stinging laughter.

As Shard sprang at him, driving in blows with skilled ferocity, something steady in Brock's mind kept him cool and composed. It was well this was so, as Brock now was fighting for his life.

By this time both men had forgotten what the primitive forces of nature in this pot hole had done. Nearer, nearer yet, they came to the fissure. Suddenly, with a sword thrust of terror, Brock did remember it. He was being driven back and knew he was on the edge of an unseen, unplumbed black depth. Since he could not take a step forward, he seized his one chance and sprang backward.

He cleared the great crack, but his unexpected retreat wasn't understood by the infuriated Shard, who rushed after him.

Before the astounded eyes of Brock, Shard vanished, even as he uttered a yell of victory. The triumphant Shard had plunged out on empty air, and had shot downward into the fissure, disappearing forever.

A man has time to think when he falls any great distance. Later, Brock, when he was

able to believe what had happened, wondered for a moment what thoughts had been Shard's. Then Brock's own hopes soared as he heard a voice from the pot's lip, Dessa's voice.

"Quest, Quest! Come away from that awful chasm! Stay over this side till I can get back with my lasso."

When he'd climbed out of the pothole and hungrily eaten the sandwiches and drunk homemade wine Dessa had brought with her, Brock heard from her that someone, undoubtedly Shard, had forged a note to the management from "Ross River Slim," saying Slim had been called to Mexico.

Dessa hadn't been deceived by the forgery. Restless and worried, she couldn't sleep. Then the old cowboy Saddler had maliciously teased her. She flushed as she quoted him,

" 'Mebbe that there wild one I see you're grievin' about, done fell in the Devil's Ladle and has gone down below.' "

Angrily she told Saddler that Quest had no reason to go near the ugly hole. But the joke, made in malice, had worried her somewhat so finally, she had headed out secretly for the natural trap. Yes, she'd heard Shard hadn't showed up, but her father had insisted the management cover the disappearance of the two rodeo riders for another twenty-four hours. They might both turn up. Perhaps each was on an ill-advised spree. He asked them to have a little patience before starting a mare's nest.

Now it was Brock's turn. He told her, in detail, the story of Hasper, his blackmailing of Shard, his dying lie about Brock, the consequent trapping of Brock by Shard and all that happened afterward.

She paled as she listened. His story finished, she said quietly:

"Well, I can be sure of one thing. *You* have no ugly secret in your life, Rider Quest!"

It was Brock's turn to whiten. "How wrong you are," he said hoarsely. "I'm a fugitive, charged with cold blooded murder."

He could not look at her but he heard her gasp. His decision now was made. He would tell her the truth and let her judge him. He plunged into the account of what happened at Red Gulch ranch, all of it, and his escape from the Camerons.

When he had ended she did not speak. He looked at her, ready to face the abhorrence she must be feeling.

He met a pair of eyes lustrous with pity and shining through tears. He felt one of her warm hands clutch his, heard her steady, sweet voice saying:

"You are innocent, and I love you!"

The quick, impulsive pressure of her hand, the steadfast loyalty in her tones, her fearless faith in him, not only amazed him; it shook him as nothing else could have done. It nearly destroyed his self control.

Marveling, he sprang to his feet, trying to free his hand, but she clung to it, rose with him, loosing her clasp, but only to lock her fingers around his neck, draw down his head and lay her cheek against his.

"Rider Quest," she murmured. "There'll be no more Brock Dorn, no Red Gulch treacheries! Just you and me!"

His will, fierce as it was, surrendered. He caught her close to his heart.

"Ah, I never dreamed there could be anyone like you."

But scarcely had their lips met when he drew back, firmly determined to be worthy of her trust. He tore himself from her.

"Dessa, help me," he said brokenly. "Don't touch me again. Wait for me, if you will, for a time, so that if I can figure out any way of getting myself cleared, I can marry you."

CRAPTER XI

Arrest

TURQUESA buzzed and buzzed with the exciting incident of the blackmailer Hasper, the red dog, and always returned to the climax, the battle for life between the two rodeo contestants and the vanishing of Shardon. It seemed strange to Brock later, that his enemy had met the very fate which the Camerons had once attributed to him, weeks ago, back in Hamaca, death in the slide at Nan's cave.

Many said and all realized how lucky it was for Brock that Dessa had happened to reach the pothole in time to see the end of the fight. Brock's truthfulness regarding the incident had been established by her. Only Brock and Yarrow knew that she had wandered, because of a hunch brought on by Saddler's malicious teasing, and that her discovery of the pothole had been only the result of merest accident.

Brock, as Quest, found all the favorable publicity showered on him deeply disturbing.

A newspaper, *The Turquesa Tally,* published the story. True, it carried no photograph of "Quest." Brock managed to avoid being photographed. But there was a description of Quest which fitted Brock Dorn only too closely for comfort.

He knew *The Hamaca Herald* hated the *Turquesa Tally* and all its works, and hoped the sensational news in Turquesa would not be re-printed in Hamaca.

In the meantime the rodeo continued with increasing popularity in Turquesa. As an added attraction, preparations for another four-in-hand race had been completed as promised, new teams had been selected and announcements had been made on glaring posters which were posted on the walls of the town. The idea made a hit with rodeo followers and the rush for seats indicated that the crowds would almost be more than the tiers could handle.

The new teams would be as follows: Four grays, Silcox driving; a four-in-hand of oddly spotted horses, driven by Ray Smith, another rodeo cowboy and a fine whip; and a quartet of glossy, beautiful chestnuts from the Rodeo Rampant, driver "Ross River Slim."

Yarrow warned Brock that he thought the grays and the pintos, while short on beauty, were longer on speed than the magnificent chestnuts. Brock didn't answer. He had a curiously deep understanding of horses and he felt in the chestnuts something responsive that might help—if the driver's personality appealed to them. And it was this magic rapport between horses and man that lifted the chestnuts into marvelous running, and into winning.

Brock drove from the arena, the plaudits of the spectators thundering in his ears and the big prize his.

But scarcely had he turned the buckboard team over to rodeo wranglers when Haddon, the Hamaca sheriff, stalked toward him.

In a few days Harley Haddon would be running for re-election as sheriff. He was vain of the authority the office gave him, but he feared he had become short on popularity and he yearned to distinguish himself in some striking solution of a murder case, if the solving of it could be made reasonably safe. But no murder mystery was at hand. The last slaying had been Ian Cameron, and his killer had undoubtedly been lynched.

To the Hamaca sheriff's amazement, his chance came through that very Cameron slaying, and through Haddon's sister. Against her will her only son was in the Turquesa rodeo circuit and she had wired Haddon to see the rodeo and report to her on Chad's safety. Chad, it seemed, just didn't write letters.

Haddon took a day off.

He saw the rodeo. And in the rodeo he saw his chance for a brilliant coup, for there, still alive, he was almost certain, he saw the supposedly dead Brock Dorn.

He told himself he was sure. But he'd rarely seen Brock Dorn who, at the time, had been wearing a thick stubble of beard and a low pulled sombrero. If this really were Brock, he'd deny it. Haddon wired his special deputy to collect Nan and Losset and ship them at once by train to Turquesa.

AN ANSWERING wire from his deputy soon arrived, assuring him Nan and Losset would come into Turquesa that night, and see him in the morning.

Arresting this rodeo rider in the midst of his wildly picturesque career was an idea which appealed mightily to Haddon's sense of dramatic self importance. The whole county would ring with the reopened case of Ian's murder. The Camerons would be hauled up to account for usurping the law, however clumsily, and, in short, this acuteness and prompt action on Haddon's part would cinch his reelection!

If it turned out he was wrong about this so-called Ross River Slim, well, that couldn't be helped. The law could impose no penalty for a slight error on the part of a zealous law officer, and this Slim would be none the worse. Later he would be released with a civil apology.

Haddon's approach gave Brock no surprise. Any intelligent fugitive, no matter how he suppresses the thought, knows that sooner or later someone inimical to him will turn up from his past life.

But Brock, always observant, had discovered, some time ago, in Hamaca, that Haddon was nearsighted but hated glasses and wouldn't wear them. This deficiency Haddon tried to remedy by memorizing outlines of various persons, then ways of walking, and gestures, trying to conceal the fact from most people that faces were to him, unless very close, only a vague blur.

Brock's tall, powerful figure, his springy, light stride, his swift way of turning his head, were clear in Haddon's memory from

the few, casual times he'd seen Nan's foreman. Brock's face was usually stubble bearded, his hat pulled low. To Haddon it had been just a bearded blur. Brock's baritone he'd never heard.

Haddon, his right hand on his gun, stalked menacingly up to his quarry, of whom he wasn't wholly sure.

"You're under arrest for the murder of Ian Cameron, Brock Dorn," he said.

Brock stared him and shrugged. "You loco, feller?"

"You're Brock Dorn."

"I see you've a sheriff's badge, so I'll answer," Brock said in an annoyed tone. "I'm Quest. They call me Slim of Ross River."

"I was with Rothsay when he saw his brother shot down, ambushed," Haddon said harshly. "We identified your horse, your outfit. I couldn't join the Camerons in pursuit of you because of an immediate matter of my own. They got you. Somebody must have cut you down after they left you. I had a seat for this show, looking to watch my sister's son in it. I saw him and you in this morning's parade and, afterward in the arena. I studied you with my field glasses. You're Dorn. I've sent for Red Gulch Nan who raised you, and for Losset, whom you grew up with. Salters will jail you for me till the witnesses can get here. You're covered."

Brock eyed him scornfully. "I'm not heeled, you misguided fool. We're not armed in the arena. I'll see your witnesses when they come, but not in jail. Or the county will pay for a false arrest."

His cool air staggered Haddon. But the law officer feared that, if he were right and yet let his quarry remain free, to wait for the hoped for identification outside the jail, there'd probably be no one to identify. Brock would vanish!

Yarrow had joined the group of listeners, and directly afterward Salters also arrived. Haddon looked at them sharply.

"This *is* Brock," he said curtly to Salters. "You've claimed you don't want the show upset for nothing. His part for this twenty-four hours is over. I'm only asking you to hold him till my witnesses come. You know who they are. You're read up on the case. I aim to take him—or kill him for resisting arrest."

Yarrow cut in. "You jailing the material witnesses too, soon as they come, making sure they'll appear in the morning?"

"No need to jail them!" Haddon said grimly. "They're decent people. They'll be only too glad to testify. They'll stay at the Haney House after they get in tonight and come to the jail right after breakfast."

DESPITE his protests, the two officers took Brock to jail. Brock walked into the cell assigned him and the steel door clanged shut behind him. The sound sent a cold shudder through him. He heard the striding boots of the sheriff move on down the corridor.

Brock Dorn walked over to a gray blanketed cot, sat down on it, flung his sombrero beside him and, his head in his hands, tried to reconcile himself to the sinister coils of his present circumstances and could not. Life with its treacheries was a Devil's world with no safety anywhere! He who loved freedom passionately and had wronged no man, faced death or long imprisonment!

He sprang up. This was no time for getting sorry for himself. As a tight-rope walker forgets everything but keeping his balance, so must he, Brock, think only of plans for escape.

"I can fork wild horses, why not my own mind too," he mused, and with this thought, composure came, and with composure added courage.

He stood at the window looking out and was there an hour later when, unexpectedly, his cell door opened, clanged shut, as Brock wheeled from the window.

"Miss Yarrow to see you, Quest," Sheriff Salter's voice came to his ears.

The disapproving law officer walked away down the corridor, leaving them alone.

To his astonishment Dessa came forward smiling.

"Hello, Rider Quest. This will straighten out, someway."

He did not take the hand she put out. It fell by her side.

"Yes, it will straighten soon, by death," he said with grim steadiness. "I'll not have a chance, Dessa. This is it! For your dad's sake and your own, you better forget me. Don't come here again! I'll stand it better that way."

She came close to him. She was not smiling now but her eyes were gravely sweet. She took one of his hands in both of hers.

"I'm marrying you, Rider Quest. Right away!"

Brock gasped. "Dessa, you're mad! Why

did your father let you come here?"

"He did his best to stop me, but he couldn't. I'm of marrying age, and the old preacher is all ready to come in. We'll have jail officials for witnesses but our marriage will be hard and fast—and forever, darling."

Brock Dorn caught her into his arms, kissed her eagerly then swept her to the cell door.

"Sheriff!" he called.

Before he could call again she put warm fingers over his mouth. "Hush, hush! You can't stop me."

But the sheriff appeared at once. "Miss Yarrow is leaving," Brock said. "She must not come here again. I can't see her."

CHAPTER XII

Night Weaves Its Tapestry

RELUCTANTLY Dessa went away at last! As her footsteps died, it seemed to Brock they receded from his heart, but he had had to protect her from the folly of love. For himself he could see no hope of escaping from this trap and, for her sake, he could not let her share his bleak future.

Pacing the cell hour after hour, leaving untouched the food brought him, he could foresee nothing but horror and disaster if he stood trial, with Nan, Losset and all the Camerons baying at him like bloodhounds. Only one way lay open. That of escape.

He must escape! After all the jail was not of stone but of 'dobe. He must not expect any outside help. Yarrow would watch his daughter closely after this. Now that Brock had sent her away, Yarrow would make sure she had no further contact with the man known as Quest.

Walking his cell floor, there came into his memory a fragment from an old book he had idled into at Yarrow's bookcase of odds and ends—"and if so be a man survives in this most difficult of all worlds, it shall be by courage alone, seeing that it is courage keeps his mind quit of terror, free to plan. . . ."

"Quit of terror, I will be," he thought, and felt his mind steady into a cold resolution that he would win the world's greatest prize —freedom.

Tired of pacing he paused beside his gray blanketed cot. He sat down, his legs stretched out before him. He had certainly been thoroughly frisked. He stared at his boots. Handmade, expensive boots. They'd been Tom's, he'd owned several pairs. Haddon had even found the knife inside them.

He sat further back on the cot and crossed one boot over his left knee. The heel could carry something inside it. He examined both heels, tapped them. The leather sounded dully solid. At best a coiled bit of steel there would only be servicable for cutting rope, too infinitesimal for heavy digging in adobe around the window bars.

He stared bitterly at the ornamental boot strap. Suddenly he leaned down toward it. He had thought these boot straps mere vanity. They were of leather, appliqued on the boot's exterior, and were good four inches long of scrolled thick leather with several tiny silver conchos . . . just an unusual excuse for dandyism. They extended over the boot top barely enough to give service.

But perhaps, as a blind—

On a dimly analytical impulse he caught the top of the bootstrap and yanked at it savagely. The weak cotton threads, purposely chosen for their weakness, instantly broke all down the line. The strap came off in his strong fingers.

A shallow groove showed in the heavy boot top leather, showed also in the inside of the strap. This had concealed a promising steel blade, nearly as long as the strap. From the second boot he garnered another.

* * * * *

Under a grimly white moon the night hours moved on, slow or fast according to the view of those considering them.

The night clerk looked balefully at the lobby clock. He was sleepy and tired but he didn't go off duty until one. When the phone rang he yawned and slowly took down the cradle, and mumbled:

"Haney House."

"This is Sheriff Haddon of Hamaca," a voice said indistinctly. "Losset Hames in?"

The clerk yawned again. "Drifted out some while ago. Asked me where he could get a game of cards. I told him at the Green Owl." The clerk didn't add he got a rake off by sending possible pigeons there. The voice muttered thanks and the speaker hung up. The clerk wearily replaced the receiver in the cradle.

A few blocks away, in the Green Owl, nobody woke because no one had gone to sleep. Like the dive's patron bird, the Green Owl's talons were busy at night.

Behind the ample bar and above it the Owl's special pride, a big mirror in a gilt frame, reflected the barkeep's shining dome, glittering glasses and promising bottles.

SMOKE from various cigarettes floated or whirled in the air. Spilt whisky rose like incense to the god of luck. Over at the battered piano the half drunk musician amused himself by playing a low funeral march which didn't trouble the gamblers at the tables, because they were too absorbed to hear it.

There came, in due time, the hour in which the majority of Turquesa's inhabitants slept deeply. Sheriff Salters of Turquesa snored slightly, just enough to demonstrate that he was having peace and, in his case, pleasant dreams. There was only one prisoner in the Turquesa jail and Salters didn't have to worry about him. He was Haddon's property.

Some such idea might have been in his deputy's mind also, for he slept as heavily as Sheriff Salters. At any rate no gnawing, uneasy sense of responsibility troubled the slumbers of either.

So much couldn't be said of Haddon, who'd been obliged to leave his prisoner there. He had a cheap room in a cheap hotel and the mattress sported lumps in the most annoying spots. He slept but he woke at intervals and just when the town's slumber was in general highly satisfactory, Haddon woke almost believing someone had come into the dark little room. But no, he heard nothing. He tried again, and vainly, to sleep.

It wasn't only the lumps in the mattress; he had some unpleasant bed-fellows. One bit him again with especial diligence. Haddon cursed and resolved to get that one at least. He lighted his lamp. But he didn't seek his quarry. He was too busy staring with astonished and fearful eyes at a man who advanced toward him, and who had him covered—with Haddon's own gun. . . .

Losset Hames made still another bet. The risk he took was inordinate for he'd no money to back it. He *must* win, because he was out of funds and he wanted money enough for a stake and a ticket to some distant point. He didn't want to identify Brock. This reluctance was not from any remorse. He simply feared to meet the blazing, piercing contempt of Brock's eyes, feared also that Brock might trap him into some dangerous admission now that Brock had plenty time to think up some subtle form of attack.

He lost again, in spite of a hunch that he'd win, in spite of the gambling charm given him yesterday by an oracular old gypsy with a suspiciously Irish accent. And suddenly he realized how hot the cold-eyed men he sat with would make things for him when he didn't cough up what he owed. IOUs didn't go with this crowd.

Nan! It was all her fault. She had expected him to take Brock's place, although she knew how he loathed work! There'd been nothing but conflict between them, especially since Nan had discovered he had secretly sold some of the Red Gulch cattle and had spent the money on cards and women. After that she punished him with bitter reproaches, and with forever telling him how different Brock had been. She didn't realize that her spoiled tiger cub could be dangerous to her.

Then one day he made sure they were alone and told her he knew she had a secret cache of gold and that he meant to have her show it to him at once, at this very hour!

He trailed a whip in hand but Nan counted that as a childish bluff. He told her both he and Brock knew she had a cache, but there had been no use tackling her about it while Brock was there. Brock would only have taken her part.

"Brock!" she repeated. "Brock would take my part? Yes, he would have done that. But you put down that silly whip and get to work or get out. I've been a fool with you—a fool! I helped kill Brock to save you. God have mercy on me for what I did! Not one dollar will you ever get of that gold."

Then he had beaten her. Strong as she was, he was far stronger. But when he would pause and ask her to show him the cache she only had cursed him with frightful fluency. Finally she had fainted and, baffled and raging, he had left her.

SUMMONED by Haddon to Turquesa he'd borrowed ten dollars from Haddon's deputy who'd looked him up. Out of that he bought his ticket to Turquesa, with what was left he gambled.

The dealer was riffling the pack. Cold sweat sprang to Losset's forehead. What

was he to do about these wolf-faced fellow gamblers?

Unexpectedly he got a temporary answer. Every light in the room, in the house, went out. Darkness enveloped the place, vast, inky, complete!

Confusion, shouts and two shots followed. Tables went over, chairs crashed. It was all sweet in Losset's ears as he sprang up eagerly. For the present he could lose the men he dreaded.

Before he could struggle through the forms, a hand clutched his arm, a voice promised hoarsely,

"This way out. No need to tackle the crowd."

The two soon were out of the house and in an alley and then in a backstreet before Losset could get his bearings. There still were no lights, the town was parsimonious with them.

"Thanks," Losset said. "I didn't know that exit." He thought, "I might make a friend out of him and borrow from him, whoever he is."

"Looks like we might see more of each other, to better acquaintance," Losset went on suavely. "Where you rooming?"

"Not far. Come along, and as you say, we'll get better—acquainted."

They passed another alley. Voices came through it from the parallel street. The Camerons! They'd been on the same train with Losset. He shuddered, wished Haddon's deputy hadn't told them about Brock. They might complicate things in some way he, Losset, couldn't foresee. And anyway he never wanted to be near them. The voices died away. Losset's thoughts went back to his companion.

Losset thought, "Hope he isn't planning to turn the tables and try to borrow from me." He grinned sourly to himself.

"Stranger here?" he asked smoothly.

"Sort of. But I've done pretty well. Fair sized roll."

They soon entered a doorway into a room where a single candle burned feebly on the mantelpiece. It was near the guttering stage and its faint radius of light seemed merely to accentuate the room's deep shadows.

His host spoke in even hoarser, lower tones. "I better trim this candle. Light that lamp for me. Matches right by it."

Swiftly and willingly Losset did so, eager to study his companion's face, hoping it would show inexperience and a reasonable amount, at least, of credulity.

The lamp blazed up. It had no shade and deluged the place with sharp illumination. The matches were poor, it had taken several strikings to get the flame started. In that time his host had crossed to the door.

"Got a nosey landlord," the man said in the same low, hoarse tone. He locked the door and turned. For the first time Losset realized the stranger was as tall as he and in rodeo garb, and was shading his face with his sombrero he'd just taken off, as though the light hurt his eyes. Then the stranger let the Stetson fall.

Incredulity and shock wrung a thin gasp from Losset.

"Not—*you*!" he cried. Instinctively his gaze dropped from the revealed face to a gunhand. Losset saw he was covered.

"You know the dead do walk sometimes, Losset," Brock said grimly. His next words beat with sledge-hammer force on Losset's terrified mind. "Sure as you try howling for help I'll kill you, blow out the lamp, and escape. Hands up!"

Losset's hands flew up. "I had to pawn my guns and I'm not heeled," he whined in shaken tones.

Brock made sure of this. Then at his direction they sat at the table opposite each other.

"Now we'll talk over things," Brock said, coldly, clearly.

"Yes, Brock, yes! I'm glad you're living. We can get together. Nan still has that gold."

"Quit babbling and answer me. Why did you kill Ian Cameron? Was it over that wench, Juanita?"

"Yes. I'd been drinking. I found her with Ian Cameron who got away. She'd sworn she'd be true. I loved her. I followed Ian and killed him because she betrayed me. But I won't admit that killing publicly, Brock. I can't—I can't! I'll help you escape. I'll share the gold with you, but if you try to make me admit publicly that I shot Cameron, I'll deny it. It's my word against yours, and Nan's word against yours. You can't ruin me. You needn't try. But I'll befriend you. Don't look at me like that. You can't expect me to destroy myself."

A barely audible sound stopped him, a faint squeak. He turned, in nervous fright.

The hall door remained closed and locked, and no other door had been in sight, yet two men had moved quietly into the room—Haddon and Salters.

Behind them gaped open what had seemed a section of wall, no more than that. But now a narrow entrance, whose edges had been concealed by hanging clothes, yawned wide.

CHAPTER XIII

Nan

LOSSET stared at them with terror dilated eyes. Haddon, gun in hand, let out a snarl.

"You've made a fool of me for the last time, Losset," he growled. "You're under arrest."

Losset had only one impulse left—flight. He bounded for the window. Brock held his fire. Haddon didn't. The room exploded with the roar of Haddon's shot. The slug caught Losset as he was smashing through the glass. He fell backward on the floor, dead instantly.

Salters shrugged. "Mite precipitant, Haddon! We could've caught him before he got through."

Brock straightened out the dead man, glad that in the night's work he hadn't been forced into killing Losset. They had grown up together and he didn't want Losset's death on his hands, if it could be helped.

Salters opened the connecting wall door still wider. He and Brock carried Losset into a small bedroom adjoining and laid him on the single bed, then returned to Haddon.

Haddon holstered his smoking gun. Good election stuff after all. He glanced at the broken window, seeking all dramatic details. The window was bare, for Losset had torn down the shade. The sheriff barely had time to note this and say "Nan—" when a gun roared outside and a slug sung past his temple. Salters jumped for the light, snapped it off. Brock coolly put the shade in place and again turned on the light.

"Bet that was meant for me, Haddon," he said. "Rothsay Cameron's in town and you and I weren't far apart."

The unlocked front door below was thrown open, steps raced up the stair, and gun in hand Rothsay appeared, his eyes blazing. Roderick was beside him. But before they could enter, before Brock could interfere, Salters was in the lighted hall, barring the entrance, shouting to them the illuminating truth.

They couldn't quite believe it at first but Haddon came out and rather pompously added his testimony. Rothsay looked sick and Roderick paled.

"Let me in to him," Roderick said hoarsely. "You take my guns, Sheriff."

"Not necessary," Brock said levelly, throwing open the door.

"You boys dragged me through torture but maybe it'll teach you to give the next man you grab a chance for a fair trial," Brock said to the Camerons, after they and Salters had come into the room. "Any more of your tribe in town?" He looked at Roderick.

"We all came. Haddon's deputy helped us. The other boys are covering front and back of the house," Roderick said hastily. "Go down, Rothsay, quick, and tell them the truth." Rothsay, glad to escape from an embarrassing situation, ran down stairs.

Brock stood with folded arms, coldly eying Roderick. Under his gaze Roderick's troubled eyes fell.

"Brock, don't make this a feud," he said slowly. "Or at least not with the others of us. I know you can't forgive us, but don't make it a feud. I'll do anything you like in reparation. "

"Yeah? Lying?"

Roderick flushed deeply. "No."

"All right. You said *anything.* I want one shot at you, and you unarmed—out in the chaparral—us two alone. I'll hit you where I please! One shot. Fifty were fired down that slide at me."

The two sheriffs, startled, took a step forward in unison, opened their mouths in unison, stepped back and said nothing.

Roderick paled. "Agreed, but you better make it two shots, Brock," he said coolly. "We have been at the jail to drag you out. You were gone. We started back to the house where we're lodging, had to pass here. Rothsay saw you and fired at you before I could stop him. But that's my responsibility."

BROCK'S indignation broke loose. "You murdering fools," he began furiously, then reined his anger into silence as he stood staring at Roderick.

"Yes, fools," Roderick said steadily. "But you never in your life loved anybody as we loved Ian, and how could we doubt Nan and Losset?" He added in bitter wonder, "Losset

was a hare-brained fool himself, and look at the mischief he made."

"It don't take a wise man to make trouble," Brock said dryly. He added slowly, "I don't want to shoot at you, Roderick. I just wanted to see if you'd be willing to pay. Strange thing about it is—your trying to murder me brought me—but never mind that!"

Roderick looked and felt more than relieved. He loosed his burning curiosity. "Reckon you mayn't care to tell me, but how did Salters and Haddon happen to be here, overhearing Losset?"

Salters laughed. "Brock held us both up, bullied us into consenting to lie in ambush till he could fetch in a witness to his innocence. He sounded convincing because if he was guilty looked like he would have grabbed a horse and hit the trail. He even asked me to furnish the ambush house. Of course he'd already located Losset. Soon as he had us hidden and waiting he went after Losset. How'd you fetch him in so easy, Brock?"

Brock, rather grimly, told them.

Salters persisted, "But the lights going out? Coincidence?"

"Not exactly. A Green Owl attendant took every cent I had as a bribe."

A call from below stairs, "Roderick!" sent Cameron hurrying to the stairhead. He came back to say rather grimly that Rothsay had taken on himself to bring Nan. All the Camerons knew where she was lodging only a couple of blocks away.

Brock understood. Rothsay wanted her testimony at once, to see whether Losset's admission, heard by the two sheriffs, was upheld by hers. Brock waited grimly with the law officers and the other Camerons.

Nan came swiftly. She had never gone to bed; she had spent the night dressed and restless.

"Now she will try to deny Losset's confession being true." Brock thought grimly. "Now she will try to blacken me again, even though Rothsay has told her who killed Losset." Rothsay was taking her in to Losset. Brock watched her from where he stood.

For a moment Nan stood looking down on Losset but she did not uncover the covered face, though she put her fingers on his silent pulse and made sure his heart beat no longer. Then she turned and came back, and faced the waiting men. Refusing the chair Salters offered her, she stood by the center table one hand resting on it. Looking at Brock, she spoke in slow, cold, repressed tones.

"After the Camerons took you away, I'd a terrible time with Losset," she said. "He got wilder every day, drinking, gambling. Wouldn't do a stitch of work. Sold off some of my cattle secretly. Then one morning he came downstairs half drunk, said he knew I had a gold cache somewhere, that you knew it too, though neither of us could tell where it was. He said you warned him to let me alone about it or you'd thrash him. He was afraid of you, Brock. I stood up to him, told him I did have hidden gold but he'd never see a dollar of it until he worked hard for a year."

"Nan, did he really beat you?" Brock asked her.

"Yes. He was trailing a blacksnake whip. He said he'd flog the secret out of me. I couldn't believe he'd dare touch me with that whip, but because he couldn't get the secret out of me, he beat me till I fainted. When I come to I was alone. I sat there holding my head in my hands and there come into my mind a line I'd heard somewhere, 'Ephraim is wedded to his idols.' Well, I'd had me an idol, and to save it I had lied away your life, Brock. Knowing you were innocent I let those half drunk lynchers take you—you who were my shield and my defense. I ain't asking your forgiveness. You couldn't grant it."

STRANGELY enough, Brock's fierce bitterness against her was receding. The wild wine of happiness and freedom was racing in his veins.

"What you did was done under terrible pressure, Nan," he said slowly, quietly. "It was Losset or me. You can bury your dead in peace."

Tears blurred her vision. She dashed them away. "You're a man," she said harshly. "But when there was no pressure, I cheated you, lied to you—all your life with me."

"Cheated? Lied? But how—"

She cut in on him. "Your parents were drowned in that flood—that was truth. But I found their bodies and buried them. I also found their two locked trunks beside the chest of money you must have seen in that slide tunnel. Rothsay says you escaped through it when they thought you were dead in an abyss."

Brock made an eager step toward her, then checked himself.

"In the trunks you found papers telling who they were—who I am?"

"Yes. I have all their papers safe for you. You're Gordon Wheeler, only child of Mavis and Peter Wheeler who were on their way to San Diego. There was fifteen thousand dollars in that chest of theirs—yours. But I stole two thousand of it, and I'm ready to be jailed for that."

"Put that two thousand against my maintenance before I was able to work for you, Nan," he said quietly.

Tears rose to her hard eyes but didn't fall. "Since you want it that way," she said.

"If you're short on funds, some of this gold can bury Losset," Brock said gently. "I'll tell the undertaker that. Later I'll see you, Nan, and get my stuff from you." His rising pity for her enabled him to suppress all signs of the mad joy dancing in his heart. A name of his own! He couldn't help adding, "These folks of mine—they seemed pretty nice?"

"There's plenty of evidence, Brock, that they were fine people."

A name of his own! A fine name, fit to be accepted as hers by the sweetest girl in the world!

When the business concerning Nan and Losset was settled, Brock went to Dessa, but not quite yet could the lovers go to the altar. Out of his deep knowledge of humanity, Yarrow talked with his daughter alone.

"Dessa, before you have a husband and I have a son, let him drink his heady draft of fame first," Yarrow said. "You can't understand daughter, but he's young, daring, and there's a conflict in him right now, like an eagle wanting to try his wings. If you want a perfect life of perfect love, let him go free for awhile."

"But he wants to stay."

"He will do whatever you say. I've asked him to wait. And you, do you love him enough to trust him, to wait for him a year?"

A sob choked her rounded throat, but she whispered with the courage of real love.

"Yes."

IT WAS twelve months later when Gordon Wheeler, alias Brock Dorn, alias Quest, alias Ross River Slim, came back to Turquesa with the rodeo, came as its nationally famous star. Once more he rode through Turquesa's gayly decorated streets, in the van of the rodeo, his horse almost dancing to the wild rodeo band-music.

When the glittering parade finished its enchantment for the delighted spectators, the whole brilliant stream of riders didn't disperse as usual.

Instead they left their horses and poured into Turquesa's largest church and, strange to say, the band came with them.

The riders found seats. The band went up into the gallery and presently a song of freedom, and of the West, flowed from its instruments.

The top rodeo star was at the altar. Up the aisle came the loveliest of girls. The music whispered into silence. The gentle voice of the preacher began. . . .

So comes the sailor from the sea, the hunter from the hills, the seeker after fame from enough of laurels, ready for life's deep foundation—home.

Coming in the Next Issue

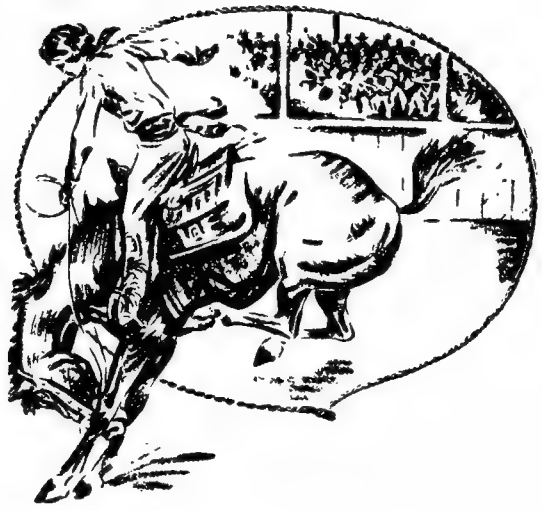
MOUNTAIN RIDER

A Deeply Appealing Rangeland Novelet by L. P. HOLMES

Reckon You're Right

By

WILL GARTH



When Jane Hunter enters the roping contest, a heart's lassoed

JIM LARKIN raked his spurs back and forth along the heaving sides of the wildly bucking roan. To the ears of the man in the saddle came the roar of the gun that was the signal the ten seconds ride was over. A cheer came from the spectators in the stands at the Trail City Rodeo.

The pick-up men rode up. Larkin tossed Blue Streak's reins to the nearest man and slid out of the saddle. He moved stiffly across the arena to the chutes as the pickup man led the roan away.

"Nice ride, Jim," Jane Hunter told him as he reached the spot where she was standing beside Buck Jeffery. "The Bar H is proud of you."

Larkin nodded. He glanced at Jane, conscious of her blond beauty, the air with which she wore her bright colored rodeo outfit. He found himself wishing, he had said she, herself, was proud of him and hadn't included the whole Bar H in her congratulations.

"Blue Streak didn't seem to put up much of a fight," Buck Jeffery said. "Didn't look like such a tough ride to me, Jim."

There wasn't anything nasty in the way the big red-headed waddy said it. His words seemed merely a statement of facts. Larkin smiled. He was big, dark haired and had a casual air about everything.

"Reckon you're right, Buck," Larkin said. "I've ridden tougher broncs than Blue Streak."

His words died away in a little silence. Jane stared at him, a strange expression on her face. Jeffery smiled faintly as though amused by some secret joke, and Larkin found the smile puzzled him.

"It didn't look like an easy ride," Jane said, her voice low. "You certainly had me fooled, Jim."

Larkin wanted to tell her it hadn't been easy. His body ached from head to foot from the jarring he had received in the short time he had remained in the saddle of the wildly bucking roan. Blood was still pounding in his head.

He hated himself for having so readily agreed with Buck Jeffery, yet it had always been that way back on the Bar H during the last two years. It had started the first day he had joined the outfit.

The booming voice of the announcer called out the name of another rider and another horse. Jane moved a little away from Larkin and was talking to Jeffery in a low tone. That was the way it had always seemed, Larkin thought, with Jane being remote from him and closer to Buck Jeffery.

HIS thoughts drifted back to that first day at the ranch. Jeffery had been a Bar H waddy for nearly a year, and he seemed to feel it his duty to show the new cowhand the ropes.

"There's things you've got to learn about this outfit, Larkin," Jeffery had said then. "Lem Hunter is a good man to work for providing you do your job. His daughter Jane is shore pretty and right pleasant with all the boys, but that's all there is to it."

"Meaning just what?" Larkin asked.

"That it would be just plumb silly for any of us forty and found waddies to fall in love with the boss' daughter," Jefferey said. "So even if you find you like Jane a heap, don't do anything foolish."

"Reckon you're right," Larkin said then, and that had been the first time he had agreed with Jeffery. "But she shore is pretty as a little red wagon."

With the passing months it had been Larkin who had taught Jane to handle a rope with surprising skill. He had practiced rope tricks and roping ever since he had been just a kid and he passed on his knowledge to the girl.

In all range work and in bronc riding Jim Larkin was a top hand, and so was Buck Jeffery in everything but roping. The redhead wasn't much interested in doing tricks with a lariat.

"I can handle a rope well enough to get a cow out of a bog," said Jeffery. "And that's enough for me. Just spinning a rope seems kind of silly to me—kid stuff."

"Reckon you're right," said Larkin, and he had been surprised to find he was again agreeing with the red-head. "But it's kind of fun."

"You mean teachin' Jane is fun," said Jeffery.

"Shore." Jeffery had grinned. It hadn't surprised him at all that he had agreed on that. "A heap of fun."

A roar from the crowd brought Larkin abruptly back to the present. A waddy from the Cross-In-A Box had just been thrown from a black bronc before he had completed his ride.

"I better get over to the chutes," said Jeffery. "I drew Thunder and I reckon my ride will be comin' up soon. He's a lot tougher than Blue Streak"

"Reckon you're right," said Larkin as Jeffery hurried away.

"What's the matter with you, Jim?" Jane asked moving over closer to him as they stood alone at the side of the arena. "Do you have to agree with everything Buck says?"

"Of course not," said Larkin. "But there doesn't seem any point in arguin' about it when he is usually right."

"Oh, there isn't!" Jane's eyes flashed angrily. "And I suppose that if Buck told you that black was white, you'd believe him"

"It might be gray," said Larkin. "And that's both black and white." He smiled. "Figger you'll win first prize in the girls ropin' contest this afternoon, Jane?"

"I hope so," said Jane, she looked at him an instant and then lowered her gaze. "Though I'm not sure of it, you see I've been talking to Buck about it and he seems certain that I won't win."

"Huh!" cried Larkin. "You mean that addle-headed, gangling excuse for a man told you that?"

"That was the impression I got," said Jane softly. "Don't you agree with him. You usually do, Jim."

"Blazes, no!" snorted Larkin, and he was getting madder by the second. "If he said anything like that and I heard him I'd ram the words so far down his throat he would swallow my elbow."

"You would not," said Jane firmly. "When he said you didn't make much of a ride, you agreed with him, so why should you resent his saying that to me."

"Because I taught you ropin'," said Larkin impatiently. "And I knew you were goin' to win the girls' ropin' contest when the Old Man entered all of the Bar H in this Rodeo." He glared at her. "And besides I love you!"

"What?" Jane looked at him dazedly. "What did you say, Jim?"

"You heard me," snapped Jim impatiently. "Maybe Jeffery did warn me when I first joined the outfit not to fall for the boss' daughter— "

"Oh, he did!" interrupted Jane. "And you agreed with him about that, too, I suppose?"

"I did then, but I don't now," said Jim. "I'm plumb crazy about you, and if the Old Man don't like it he can go fly a kite!"

"That I must see!" Jane said. "Dad flying a kite!" She laughed, and suddenly seemed quite pleased with the world.

LARKIN was surprised. Now that he had calmed down a little he realized he had expected her to be angry at hearing that he was in love with her. However, she seemed to take it quite calmly.

Jeffery made his ride, and it was a good one. Though personally Larkin thought Thunder wasn't half the horse Blue Streak had been when it came to bucking.

The Rodeo went on. He had left Jane and gone over and was helping the men with the horses at the chutes. He caught a glimpse of her sitting on a rail watching one of the other girls in the rodeo deftly handle a horse that

started to buck a little. A ranch boy in overalls stood beside Jane watching.

Finally the bronc riding contests were over. It was time for the trick riding and roping events. Larkin was to do some exhibition roping so he got his ropes and got ready

"First in the girls' steer roping contest will be Jane Hunter of the Bar H," came the voice of the announcer. "And the little lady can swing a mean rope, folks. "

Jane was sitting on her well trained horse waiting. The chute gate opened and a steer tore out across the arena. Jane's horse started after the steer at a swift gallop. The girl held her rope ready in her hand. She made a perfect cast and the rope caught the steer's hind legs, tightened and the animal went down hard.

"Whoopee!" shouted Larkin, snatching off his hat and waving it as he stood watching. "That's showin' 'em, Jane."

All Jane had been required to do was rope and stop the steer and she had done that in a hurry. The announcer called out her time, and it was good.

There were three other girls entered in the roping contest. One of them failed to rope her steer in the time allowed, the next one succeeded all right, but her time was much slower than Jane's had been. The third girl was good, and roped her steer fast. Larkin waited breathless to hear the last girl's time announced and then breathed a sigh of relief when he found that Jane had won by two seconds.

The four girls did some fancy rope tricks, and then Larkin and a waddy from the Cross-In-A Box did some exhibition roping. When they had finished he found that he had won that contest.

It was time for the wild steer riding and neither Larkin or Jeffery were entered in that. Larkin found that Jane had turned her horse over to one of the roustabouts to take it back to the stable. She was talking to Jeffery as Jim Larkin walked over to them.

"So you won that exhibition ropin' contest," Jeffery said to Larkin. "Guess it wouldn't have been so easy if you had had any real competition."

"Reckon you're right," Larkin said mildly

Jane looked at him and frowned. He was agreeing with Jeffery again, and it was plain she didn't like it.

"You know, I been thinkin' of asking Jane to marry me," Buck Jeffery said casually.

Jane gasped but she said nothing. She glanced at one man and then the other and waited silently.

"She's a pretty girl and needs a husband to protect her," Jeffery went on when he found that Larkin and Jane apparently did not intend to speak. "A man who has a mind of his own, to take care of things."

"Seems likely," said Larkin.

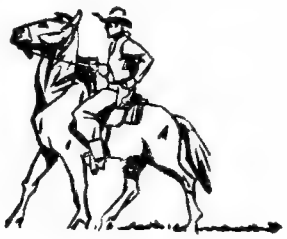
The trio walked back into a passageway beneath the stands. There was no one around but just the three of them.

Larkin stopped and looked at Jane. There was a light in her eyes that made his heart leap. Impulsively he stepped forward and swept her into his arms and kissed her. She didn't resist, in fact she seemed to thoroughly approve of the idea.

"Why—why she's in love with you," said Jeffery in the voice of a man who suddenly saw his whole world come tumbling down.

"Reckon you're right," Larkin said, still holding Jane in his arms.

"Reckon he is," said Jane softly.



Coming in the Next Issue

YOUTH IN THE SADDLE

A Swift-Moving Arena Action Novelet

By STEPHEN PAYNE

Maverick Champions

By SAM BRANT

An old-timer's quest for a long-lost son has a stirring payoff on the range and in the contest arena at Calgary!

MOSSY DEAN was jostled by contestants and hazers around the catch pens and chutes. He was buffeted by bawling steers which he helped haze. He'd done this sort of work at so many rodeos and stampedes he became well known — better known as "Mossy" Dean —Mossyhorn Dean.

Between the rodeo seasons he became a saddle tramp, never riding very long for any one outfit—always on the move. He had a habit of standing close to a stranger. Mossy Dean was always staring — searching — searching. . . .

Here at the brisk little Alberta town of Stettler he batted dust from his old jeans after chasing big steers into the catch pen at the back of the chute to get them ready for the decorating events. He felt a sadness in his heart as he watched the chute gate lift to free a big grade steer. Closely he watched the rider break at the starter's flag, flanked by his hazer.

As the two horsemen rode down on the steer, Mossy Dean was especially interested in the contestant, the decorator. Mossy quickly detected faults, and his eyes sparkled with pride as the contestant dived to the steer's horns, lit, chocked in his heels and then flashed up a hand to slip the ribboned rubber band over the critter's off horn.

Nostalgia, longing, memories set up a storm of mixed emotions in Mossy's mind. None was more qualified than he to appraise or criticise the work of a contestant. It didn't seem such a far cry back to the days when Mossy himself had cinched honors in the best riding, roping, decorating or bull wrestling society.

Mossy mingled closely with the cowhands at every show he attended. They paid him little heed, except for now and then offering to buy him a drink for some extra service rendered. He wore an old black broadcloth shirt, battered hat, wrinkled jeans and scuffed boots and he always needed a shave.

Closely he scrutinized the names of entrants on programs. For years he had searched, but always in vain.

Now his brows flicked sharply up as the announcer called attention to the next steer-decorating contestant.

"Ken Fraser, ladies and gentlemen. Ken is making his first appearance after injuries received at Calgary two years ago."

"Two years ago!" Mossy mumbled. His forehead became plowed by a series of ragged furrows, as though he were making some slow mental calculations.

He was close to the young rider now, straining forward to catch a better look at the waddy's handsome face, but he could only see him in profile.

The gate lifted. The steer broke and then Mossy Dean strained forward from his perch on a chute rail to watch.

The waddy rode well. He was crowding his bronc in well, but as he started to dive, Mossy grunted. Ken Fraser had slipped up somewhere in Mossy's book. Yet he made a perfect hand catch, chock and finish. The steer bawled and hurricaned on, red ribbon fluttering from his big off horn. Mossy Dean smiled and resumed the grinding of his eating tobacco.

"Nine seconds—flat, ladies and gentlemen," the announcer blared, and although it wasn't record time, Mossy Dean knew it was good, fast time, and would be hard to beat at this show. Mossy's eyes were still following the young rider when an official barked an order at him. He looked sharply up.

"Uh— O, yeah, the hoss chutes. Right!" He moved along to the horse chutes in a sort of daze. It was Mossy who supervised the cinching. Riders relied on his good work, for he'd never lost a saddle.

Mossy Dean bounded down from the chute, to slap at the rearing, lashing gelding with his flailing hat

Later, he watched Ken Fraser come scratching out of a chute on an arched-back roan whose empty mouth foamed as if he'd chewed on a bad bit. Mossy took in every detail of the grim-mouthed rider's technique, starting now and then when the roan seemed to be gaining a mastery. But always the young waddy recovered in time to match with poise and control every tornadic convolution the snorter executed and at the horn's blare, Mossy Dean was sure the waddy was well up in the top Day Money bracket.

It was after the sound of the horn that hell broke loose. The roan really came unwound, just as Ken Fraser reached for the neck of a pick-up man.

Mossy Dean bounded down from the chute and with flailing hat in hand nipped agilely in to slap at the rearing, lashing gelding bent on striking the slim cowhand down.

Ken Fraser dropped to the ground. A hoof grazed his side, but he managed, with Mossy's help, to scramble to safety, as the pick-up men took over and crowded the wild one off. Mossy dropped lightly to his knees and gently turned the winded rider over.

Blood trickled from a corner of Ken Fraser's mouth, but it wasn't the sight of blood that caused Mossy Dean's eyes to widen.

It was a jagged little curly scar at the left corner of the waddy's mouth.

"Ken—Fraser—" Mossy's voice was husky, scarcely audible. He was quivering in every nerve fibre as first aid men rushed in to take over. But Ken came out of it. He sat up, shaking his head, wincing with a pain in his right ribs sector. But with a helping hand he got to his feet and was soon batting the dust from his jeans with his hat, as the crowds continued to pour out their applause.

"Ken—Fraser—" Again and again, Mossy Dean repeated the name. His eyes were narrowed, filmed by moisture. For many years Mossy Dean, once champion bronc peeler, had saddle-tramped throughout the Western states and a large part of the Canadian west searching for a young waddy who carried a curly little scar at the left corner of his mouth—a feature best remembered by Mossy Dean of his son—Johnny Dean Newton.

"She must've give him a new name when she run out on me," Mossy concluded to himself. But they were calling for him at the chutes again. He turned slowly and moved back to get on with his job of cinching, but now his heart pounded savagely as mingled feelings of sadness and a strange happiness roiled in a storm of almost overwhelming proportions.

AS HE climbed in back of the chutes to pick up a cinching rod, Mossy's tongue still rolled over the name, Ken Fraser. But all at once Mossy seemed to galvanize to action, electrified with a new found animation. He moved swiftly, skilfully, now jostling the men, prodding them.

For the first time in years Mossy Dean packed a smile. He promised himself he'd buy a new shirt and jeans, shave up and have a haircut and attend the barn dance given in honor of the Stampede contestants tonight.

Finding Ken Fraser was like finding a new life, albeit Mossy figured he'd have to go about furnishing definite proof of relationship cautiously and thoroughly. Mossy's son had never known his father—he'd been too young when Della, his mother, had decided to quit the ranch, taking the boy with her, an infant, scarcely walking.

From the top rail of a chute Mossy watched the tall youngster called Ken Fraser through half-closed eyes. He was walking off to pick up his catch ropes for the calf roping entry. Mossy smiled, recalling the day he had gathered that youngster into his arms to ride hell-for-leather to town and a doctor when the infant had cut his lip on the jagged lid of a bean can carelessly left within his reach by his mother.

* * * * *

"Anybody here play a fiddle—ol' time music?" a deep voice boomed through the new barn. "Our fiddler's got himself drunk an' we—"

Mossy Dean wiped his mouth and got to his feet.

Cowhands chuckled as he strode forward to offer his services. He'd gotten himself a new plaid shirt and blue jeans. He wore a striking red silk bandana and his hair was no longer streaked and unruly, but trimmed and slicked back.

Mossy had shaved and there was a glint in his eyes as he lifted a fiddle from its case on the small plank platform. Now he cocked his head on one side as he twisted pegs, tuning up.

Mossy cast a searching glance about the "hall" as he resined his bow, but could see no sign of Ken Fraser.

Now the master of ceremonies was invit-

ing the visiting waddies to choose their pardners for a square dance.

Head low, foot tapping, an infectious grin at his mouth corners, Mossy Dean whirled his bow through the foot-tingling strains of the first change, *Wind in the Barley*. He thrilled as he watched the reaction of the whirling dancers to his music.

The caller clapped his hands and Mossy slashed his bow in the final chord. Suddenly he started, turning, to glimpse the young waddy, Ken Fraser, sitting on the platform. The waddy looked up, smiling.

"You shore know how to get the best out uh that fiddle, pardner," he praised. Mossy started, smiling. For once in a long time a young fellow had not referred to him as "old timer."

"Ain't you goin' to dance—son?" Mossy asked.

Ken shook his head.

"Ribs hurt a mite," he said. "What I came up for is to thank you for your help when that snorter was set to tear me apart. That was mighty brave of you, pardner. He'd have tromped me bad if'n you hadn't run in on him."

Mossy's eyes batted.

"Where are you ridin' regular, son?" he asked, ignoring for the moment the caller's signal to begin the second change of the dance.

"Two Links, down Macleod way. I—" The waddy broke off, glancing away as a trim auburn-haired girl strode across the floor.

"Excuse me now, huh?" he said to Mossy. "I promised that girl I'd dance with her. I got to go explain about my ribs. See you soon again, huh?"

MOSSY DEAN started. He tucked his fiddle up under his chin and struck a chord.

"Honor y' pardners, corners address . . ."

The second change was under way and Mossy Dean slashed through the *Flowers of Edinburgh* reel in a manner that had even sedate old ranchers on the side benches tapping their feet and clapping their hands.

At the end of the change, Mossy's eyes widened as he glimpsed Ken Fraser stride from an annex with the auburn-haired girl. Ken nodded to the smiling girl and left her. He was coming to the platform again—a guitar case under his arm.

"Mind if'n I chord for you a while, pardner?" Ken asked, in a soft drawl that caused Mossy's heart to spin.

"I—I'd admire to have you, son," he replied. He sounded his *A* for Ken who twisted his keys and twanged the strings. Now the young waddy looked up, smiling.

"You hit 'er, pardner. I'll toss my loop on 'er."

The dance folk whooped with delight at the new, augmented orchestra. Mossy Dean's right foot beat sharply as he whipped through the breakdown and when at last fiddle and guitar had crashed out the final chord. Mossy Dean turned away to wipe his eyes with a white spotted, red bandana.

At the supper waltz time, Ken Fraser laid down his guitar as the lovely girl of his acquaintance came up. It was a ladies' choice dance—traditionally ladies' choice.

"Now don't tell me a waltz will hurt those ribs, cowboy," the girl said, laughing softly.

"Lady's right, Ken boy," said Mossy. "Go ahaid. I'll handle this'n."

As he played softly, sweetly through "Over the Waves," Mossy could almost feel the fiddle jump above the pounding of his heart. Through slitted eyes he watched the boy and the girl, a perfect couple.

Suddenly a handsomely-dressed, good-looking young cowhand strode across the floor. Mossy Dean's brows flicked sharply up. His start was so sudden he almost missed a D string note entirely. The newcomer was striding a bit awkwardly toward Ken Fraser and his partner. Mossy watched him tap Ken on the shoulder, but Ken shook his head. A man couldn't cut in on a ladies' choice supper dance. But the newcomer persisted.

Ken Fraser at last spun clear of the girl and grabbed the other waddy by the wrists, swinging them in behind his back, to shove him protesting into the annex. There were sounds of a commotion, but shortly Ken came smiling back. He tossed hair from his eyes and returned to his partner to resume the dance.

"Trouble, shore as shootin'," Mossy told himself.

At the close of the dance, when the couples strode to the side benches to settle together for their supper, the caller—master of ceremonies, strode up to Mossy.

"Doin' a great job, feller," the caller said. "Best job we've ever had at an ol' time. They'll be a collection soon. Women-folk git ha'f for charity; you git the other ha'f."

But Mossy shook his head.

"Give it all to the womenfolk," he said slowly. "I've been paid a heap tonight a'ready. But—uh—tell me, who's the young banty that tried to cut in there?"

"Oh, him? That's Johnny Turner of the Two Links. Real salty he is when he's been drinkin'. Jealous as all git out of young Fraser who nearly whupped him today in the saddle bronc ridin'. Now yuh'd best git set for some eats—uh—I didn't git yore name right."

"Uh—Dean's the name, mister: Mossy Dean." And Mossy smiled. He had gotten so used to the name he scarcely ever used his right name, the name that had headlined more than one account of a championship rodeo exhibition.

In his mind there was already moving a plan. It was a plan to find a steady job, steady work wrangling and Mossy had his sights trained on the Two Links outfit, down Macleod way.

THEY were topping off a string of tough ones in the Two Links ranch yard as a dusty rider brought a jaded roan to a halt. Mossy Dean had come quite a distance today. Now he leaned forward in the saddle, his hands crossed and resting on the horn as he watched the tall young waddy, Johnny Turner, scratch out a long pitching, snaky bay.

Mossy half turned to smile in the direction of Ken Fraser seated on the top rail of a horse corral. He kneed his horse on so he could catch Ken's eyes.

Now a deep-throated voice boomed, and Mossy spun to glimpse a stocky, middle-aged man get up sharply from a seat on the edge of a water trough.

"Two Links boss, I reckon," Mossy decided. The rancher was booming at the pick-up men, who rode hard to take over the lathered bay.

"Like to tore his shoulders off," the rancher bellowed at the bronc peeler. "Lookit the blood on him! How often have I laid the law down ag'in long-shanked pointed spurs? Git yorese'f blunted short shanks, or by thunder! I'll stop yuh ridin' altogether. I—"

The irate rancher broke off suddenly, starting sharply as he glimpsed Mossy Dean.

"Uh-howdy?" he greeted gruffly, sweeping sharp glances over Mossy's lounging form. "You were lookin' for somebody?"

"Could be, mister," Mossy replied in his soft drawl. "Reckon you're Turner, huh?" When the rancher nodded, Mossy went on: "I'm lookin' for work—wranglin' or somethin'."

The big man half turned away, frowning. Suddenly he glanced up, his bushy brows lifted as if swift decision had come to him.

"Yuh've had experience peelin'? I don't need help, actual, but I could use a good peeler. Got a shipment uh stampede bronc stock to saddle break for Red Deer an' Ponoka shows. How about yuh hoistin' yore rig on a bronc an' let's see what yuh can do?"

Mossy spat a used quid of eating tobacco away and wiped his mouth before replying. He slowly shook his head.

"Not *my* rig, Turner," he said. "I'll use the saddles your hands are usin'. Okay, have 'em front foot a critter. . . ."

Ken Fraser hopped down from the corral rail as Mossy dismounted. He held out his hand to Mossy, grinning. Mossy watched the little scar on his mouth curl and dance. But suddenly the young waddy frowned.

"I wouldn't top one of these broncs if I were you, ol'—uh—pardner. They're plumb salty. Ain't even had a hackamore on."

Mossy smiled as he handed his reins to Ken Fraser.

"I'd be obliged if'n you'd slack off Shorty's cinch an' give him a bait," he said. "Don't worry about me. I might get piled, but don't we all—one time or another?"

A squealing wild one was being snubbed down in the corral. Handlers were having a rough time as Mossy climbed up over the top rail. He now called to a man at the cinch.

"Okay, cowboy," he said sharply. "I'll take over from now on. Always like to cinch my own kak. No offence though."

MOSSY had drawn a bald-faced wall-eye which, when the blindfold was whipped off, came smashing at the corral rails in a mad squealing effort to break its rider's leg, but Mossy flipped off his hat and batted the squealer back toward the open gate.

The bay humped his back and came out like Satan with his legs around a tornado.

Ken Fraser gasped. He felt the short hairs creep up on his neck as the stranger socked hard back on the buck rein and started scratching. Mossy Dean wore no spurs, but scratched with his boot heels with a technique that had the eyes of the watchers bugging with admiration and amazement.

The big bronc short-pitched, crowhopped

and sunfished with roars like that of a bull stung by a yellow jacket. Ken watched the stranger's face, a not unhandsome face, but thin, drawn. It was pale through its weather tan and whisker stubble—the fine mouth set grimly as if the rider suffered plenty of pain. Ken coiled his hands into hard fists, as he glanced down at Johnny Turner, smirking as he watched.

"Hi-ya-a-h-h-h!" Mossy yelled at the bronc now. He knew he had ridden out the full time of a competition ride, and if Turner was challenging him, testing him, he was going through with this ride if it was his last. He was riding for only one set of eyes—Ken Fraser's.

"Yeah-h-h-h-h! Hump 'er, you sidewindin'—"

As if in understanding, the chunky heller from the wild range arched his back, arched again and whirled in a whipping end swap that could have flicked a rider's head from his shoulders.

Ken Fraser squeezed his eyes tight. When later he opened them, he gasped: Mossy Dean was letting the lathered bronc out, forcing him into a mad climactic run which soon terminated in a chopping trot and then a walk.

Ken Fraser rushed up to meet the jaded horse and hard-breathing rider. He looked up into Mossy's drawn face and smiled encouragingly.

"Best I ever saw—pardner," he said. "How d'you feel?"

Mossy slid to the ground and for a long moment leaned against the young waddy. Now he pressed him away.

"I'm okay, son," he said. "A bit out uh practice, I reckon an'—uh—as hungry as seven barrels uh wolverines."

Ken grinned and nodded toward the ranchhouse.

You ain't foolin' me any, mister," he said. "You ain't just a rovin' saddle tramp. No man, ridin' as you did, is just a bum, a down-an'-outer hazer. You come up here for a purpose. Want to talk now, or—later?" But Mossy was looking toward the cookhouse annex to the big house. Ken nodded.

"Okay, go over an' eat. Ol' Lee Chang, the cook's been watchin' you ride. He'll admire cookin' up a supper for you."

Ken took over the bronc and Mossy turned to leg it along toward the cookhouse. He was tired, almost spent, aching in every joint but, withal strangely happy.

He heard footsteps catching up with him.

"Keep walkin', mister." Tom Turner, the Two Links owner said gruffly.

THEY struck the cookhouse together and Turner led Mossy to the mess hall. Turner swung to give orders to the grinning old Chinese cook.

"Fry up at least four aigs, Lee, with lots uh ham. Bring coffee an' a plate uh biscuits, savvy?" He then turned back to lead Mossy to a seat at the far end of the long mess table.

"Okay—Mossy Dean," he said huskily. "Talk, or would you ruther I called you Dean Newton?"

Mossy started, swinging sharply.

"You know me, huh, Turner?"

"Shore! As soon as I saw you get well into yore ride recollection, if not plumb certain recognition, come to me. Last time I saw you was before I moved north to Alberta to take over my uncle's Two Links spread. Yuh was fightin' mad after the final day of the big Cheyenne show. That was—uh—just after Della run out on yuh."

Again Mossy winced.

"What brought yuh to the Two Links, Mossy?" Turner asked. His voice was not unfriendly.

Mossy's eyes snapped open. He shot a swift glance at Turner.

"If you know so much about me, Turner, you should know why I'm here. It's because of—of—Ken Fraser."

"Huh? Ken Fraser? What about him? He's a right good boy. I found him hazin' stock at a Calgary stockyards an' offered him a job. What's in yore craw, Mossy?"

"You mean you don't know who Ken Fraser is?"

Tom Turner shook his head.

"Not any more'n he's Ken Fraser. What are you drivin' at?"

"I believe Ken Fraser's my boy—Della's boy. An' how come you know so much about Della?"

A strange, enigmatic smile hovered around Turner's mouth. He looked steadily into Mossy's sharp eyes a while, shakin' his head. He evaded Mossy's direct question.

"How come yuh figger Ken's yore boy? Got any proof?" he countered.

"Uh—not full proof, but I'm goin' by that little scar at the corner of his mouth. It's in the left corner, Turner. It's a curly scar an' there can't be too alike. Some uh Della's carelessness. She—"

"A—scar? Left hand corner uh the—mouth?" Tom Turner got to his feet, turning away. As he swung about, he gripped the edge of the table. His lips moved but no words came.

"What spooked you, Turner?" Mossy asked sharply. "You're actin' sort uh queer."

Turner again shook his head, slowly. He laid a hand gently on Mossy's shoulder.

"I—I wouldn't put too much stock in that scar if'n I were yuh, ol' timer. You could be wrong. Have you asked Ken hisself how he come by that scar?"

Lee Chang came in with the food to interrupt. When Mossy had half finished his meal, Tom Turner talked some more.

"I ramrodded the Triangle-Bar, Mossy," he said. "That's how come I knowed about you an' Della. You remember now?"

Mossy, his cheek full of hot buttered biscuit, nodded.

"Then, how come this Johnny Turner boy calls himself your son? You was never married."

Turner started, his face paling slightly. But he quickly recovered.

"Just one uh those things, Mossy. A sort of a—uh—orphan on the loose. I took him over, but he ain't panned out just right: a hard young un to manage. He allus figgers he ain't had a square break in life an'—Mossy, here's where you can come into the picture.

"I'd admire to have yuh stay on here an' take over all the work in connection with breakin' out the wild string an' rodeo practice. Keep a sharp eye on young Johnny. He's a bad influence, at times, on the other hands, especially when he gits to drinkin'."

"You mean you're givin' me full authority, Turner? Why, exactly?"

"For one reason—there's no one more qualified for the job than Dean—Newton, call yoreself Mossy Dean if you like. Then—wal, suppose we let it ride at that for the time bein'. You'll sleep here at the house. There's a spare room.

"Watch Johnny pretty close. He's got the stuff that can bring him a championship at the big Calgary show. I'd like you to he'p Johnny for his dad's sake—as square a shooter as I ever knowed—" Turner's voice trailed off to a husky whisper. "How about it, Mossy?"

Smiling, Mossy Dean nodded.

"Okay, but for the present, nobody knows uh my belief in the relationship uh Ken an' me, savvy? An' I'd rather go on as—Mossy Dean."

TOM TURNER offered his hand which Mossy gripped tightly, albeit he was sure Turner hadn't told him all he knew.

Turner moved out of doors, and found Ken Fraser. He took him in back of a calf barn for a medicine talk.

"Listen, Ken," Turner half whispered. "I want some he'p from yuh. I like yuh for yuh've been a right good waddy around the Two Links outfit. I want yuh to he'p not only me, but a real good feller who's had a string uh tough breaks in life."

"Meanin'?"

"Mossy Dean."

Ken started.

"The ol' timer? Shore, boss. I like him. I'll help out all I can, but—what can I do, special?"

Turner talked on for some minutes, giving an outline of Mossy's young life. Then he fired his big shot.

"For nineteen years or more, Mossy's hunted for a young feller like yuh—one with a curly scar at the left corner uh the mouth. He—"

Ken Fraser gasped.

"Like this—mine?" he said.

"Right. Mossy's kid, a little button in diapers, got his mouth cut on a tin can lid. Mossy sort uh ha'f figgers yuh're his boy, Ken. . . How did yuh come by that scar?"

Ken Fraser's eyes were almost closed. He smiled wistfully, then slowly shook his head.

"I was ridin' fence for an outfit when my hoss was scairt by a diamond back, boss. I was piled an' got ripped by barbed wire—mouth an' shoulder—" He broke off sharply, his eyes seeming to dance with a strange light as he gazed sharply into Tom Turner's eyes.

"I think I get what you're drivin' at, boss," he said between firmed lips. "You're thinkin' of another scar an' it scares you, worries you some, don't it? But I'll button my lip an' help out. Mossy Dean did me a good turn so—ever'thin' had better turn out right for him, or—"

Tom Turner smiled and nodded.

"It'll turn out right. I can promise yuh, Ken," he said huskily. "Mossy's takin' over all rodeo work. Now don't lock horns with young Johnny if'n yuh can avoid it. Mossy'll have enough trouble with him as it is. Moreover, I want Johnny, special, to take the sad-

dle bronc championship at Calgary. Go ahaid an' beat him, by all means, if'n yuh can. Yuh'll have ever' chance, but don't do nothin' to hamper Mossy or Johnny? Savvy?"

"Heap—savvy." Ken Fraser got to his feet. They shook hands on it and, whistling, Ken swung off toward the bunkhouse.

Three days later, following a heavy period of evening rodeo practises, Mossy Dean rode back into town. He had important mail to send, especially one registered letter to a firm of attorneys at Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Riding back to the ranch, he caught up with Johnny Turner. Mossy frowned sharply. Johnny was supposed to be helping out with the haying, but the oldster shrugged. That was outside his own purview. What Mossy felt was his business was that Johnny had obviously been drinking again. As he fetched up alongside, Johnny called:

"Hi, Mossy, y' ol' coot." He grinned. "Have a drink?"

Mossy nodded, accepted the proffered bottle and hung on to it.

"Listen, bud," he said in his kindly drawl. "Tom wants you should perk up an' catch yourself the saddle bronc championship at Calgary. I'm out to help you all I can. Why not get squared around, so we can go in an' take this championship? You're packin' a chip on your shoulder, like you was soured on life, an' that's bad for a young feller. What's eatin' you, son?"

Johnny Turner grew sullen. He slouched in his saddle and snarled sharply when his horse half stumbled.

"Tom's played 'em mighty square with you, boy," Mossy went on. Been like a father to you. He—"

Johnny swung sharply.

"How come you know he ain't my father?" he asked, his face flushed.

"Just that I've been around, Johnny. An' now, listen: Tom's put me in full charge uh peelin' an' rodeo operations. I'm here to help all you young ropers, riders an' steer wrastlers all I can, but I'm not standin' for too many monkeyshines—drinkin' an' such. They's a time an' place for all of that. Do you want that saddle bronc championship, or—don't you?"

JOHNNY TURNER'S characteristic smirk did not escape Mossy, nor did that sudden little curl to his mouth. Mossy started sharply, suddenly breathing hard, but he essayed no comment. He was allowing the truculent waddy plenty of time to make up his mind.

"Okay, Mossy," Johnny said at last. "I'll ride, but I ain't lettin' that maverick Fraser git in my hair, savvy?"

Mossy nodded. He handed the bottle back, smiling.

"Right, bud. Now have yourself another drink then—that's all. We're ridin' 'em tough an' often between sunset an' dusk, an' I mean—ridin', cowboy!"

And from sunset until dusk closed in to herald the coming soft prairie night, Mossy Dean put his cowhands through the rodeo hoops. He encouraged, he criticised and at times berated.

Twice he thrust himself between the salty young waddies, Ken Fraser and Johnny Turner, when a fight seemed imminent. His powerful hands twisting their shirt fronts, he warned them of the strength of those hands.

They were hands which in the south country, bull-dogging, had been capable of breaking a big steer's neck. They were equally capable of tearing a man apart, yet Mossy's strong fingers could bring the softest, sweetest notes from the sound box of a violin.

Entries were in. The Stampede stock had been shipped to Red Deer and Ponoka.

Then came the Calgary show, and Mossy Dean proudly rode alongside Tom Turner in the grand, continent-famed street parade.

Mossy was no longer a hazer at the chutes, but an efficient manager. He wore a contestant's ribbon pinned to his new black silk shirt, and his boots were soft, hand-tooled.

The Two Links men measured up to all of Mossy's hopes in the first days of the big show. Though Johnny Turner got a "no time" in one of the steer riding events, so did some of the biggest contestants.

It was for the saddle-bronc riding events that Mossy's interest was whipped up to the keenest pitch. He watched as Ken Fraser came out of the chute to give an excellent performance on one of the toughest broncs cut loose so far in the show.

The P.A. announcer cut in on the prolonged applause for Ken's exhibition. The announcer was calling up Johnny Turner, but there was no response. Mossy hustled his men around to search for Johnny, but it was a vain search.

Later, between the afternoon and evening shows, Mossy found the young waddy at his hotel room. He'd been drinking heavily. He was, as often was the case, truculent and bel-

ligerent, as Mossy strode in on him as he lay on his bed.

When he attempted to rise, Mossy's strong hands pushed him back. There was flame leaping from the oldster's eyes.

"You ought to be quirted, Johnny," he said quietly, but with plenty of meaning. "The rest uh the hands played ball; you went off on a souse an' let us down. You won't even be fit to ride tomorrow, but you've got to straighten up. I'm goin' to speak to the officials, claimin' sickness for you.

"It ain't quite square, but I think they'll play along. I think I got somethin' to offer 'em in exchange for re-ride, or extra ride time, for you. Git up now an' go take a cold shower. Straighten up, or by the great seven-toed Brahma, I'll—"

Mossy quivered with emotion. Johnny got to his feet, hung unsteadily a moment, then lurched toward the bathroom.

THE following day, Thursday, with two more days of the show to run, Johnny Turner sat near the judges' stand with Mossy. Together they watched the Two Links boys battle hard to maintain points standing against the cream of the North American rodeo crop of riders, ropers and decorators. Then suddenly Johnny Turner started as he heard his name come blaring out of the loud speakers.

"Ladies and gentlemen. . . Owing to illness, Johnny Turner, popular contestant from Macleod, will not ride today. He will be allowed to fill in his rides tomorrow, Friday. . . And now, ladies and gentlemen, a special feature announcement—an extra treat for you.

"An exhibition ride by one of the world's greatest, former North American all-around champion! Watch Chute Number Seven! Riding out of Number Seven on Satan's Choice, we give you a former champion of champions—Mossy Dean—Newton!"

Johnny Turner almost fell over backwards. He hadn't noticed that Mossy had glided away from his side.

"Mossy—Dean—Newton," he said huskily, gulping hard. "Why that was his— He's . . ."

Johnny broke off. The chute gate was open, disgorging Satan's Choice, topped by a rider who was already scratching perfectly as the bald-faced bronc thundered into a bag of maneuvers that swiftly brought the surging crowds up stamping, yelling.

Sunfish, chop, bawl, whirl and swap. Chop and crow-hop, then a snorting, arched-back twist that Johnny Turner himself seemed to absorb, the way he winced. He knew what Mossy, up in that Association rig, was taking.

"Mossy—Dean—Newton!" Johnny hustled forward a few steps. He tugged off his hat and yelled:

"Ride—'im—cowboy! R i d e—'im—*Dad!*" His voice was cut sharply off as if he'd swallowed his Adam's apple. Johnny Turner knew. He knew Mossy Dean was riding that would-be killer into the ground especially for him—"

The thunder from the stands was like the continuous roar of a mountain cataract. Johnny Turner swung and loped to a standing, empty-saddled horse. He vaulted into the saddle, and at the horn, as the squealing Satan's Choice continued to buck savagely, rode hard in to beat the pick-up men to Mossy's side.

Johnny started as in a flash he glimpsed Mossy's pain-wracked features. He reached for him, slipping an arm under his shoulder as he felt Mossy's arm slide around his neck.

"Thanks—son. I—I reckon you—know, huh?" Mossy said, gasping, short of breath.

YOUNG JOHNNY TURNER squeezed his eyes almost shut. He nodded and let Mossy slide gently to the ground. As the oldster champ turned to acknowledge the great uproar of applause from the stands, Johnny dismounted on the off side of his horse and stayed there until Mossy swung back around.

They moved off together, in back of the timers' tower, where Mossy Dean turned his son around by the shoulders to look keenly at the left corner of the mouth where an almost invisible little curly scar now showed as Johnny smiled.

"I—I didn't know, Dad, until they give out your name," Johnny said excitedly. "Now, mebbeso you can re'lize just how tough it's been on me. Though Tom Turner treated me like he would his own son, there was always the feelin' I'd been cheated, an' when Ken Fraser come, I—well, I ran off the end uh the rope. How did you get on to me?"

"First I suspicioned somethin' was wrong with ol' Tom. I figgered he knowed more'n he told me. I got some mail away to Wyomin', then—on that ride back from town, I glimpsed the little scar, son. It's growed a lot smaller! Then I forced the rest out uh Turner yesterday. It was him buried your

mother. He paid for the funeral because Della, your Maw, had used up all the money she had from the sale of our ranch. But we'll palaver some more later, son. Now, how about tomorrow an' the next day?"

Johnny bared his fine teeth in a wide grin.

"We've been a pair uh mavericks a long time, Dad," he said with feeling. "Now watch me. We're comin' out uh this a pair uh—maverick champions."

Mossy Dean Newton's eyes batted. He turned away, happier than he'd been in a long time. Tomorrow he would side Tom Turner in the tower to watch, through glinting eyes, Johnny Turner—Johnny Dean Newton, whirl through to capture a championship. Mossy had never been so sure of anything in all his life. . . .

As they shipped out Sunday Mossy sat in his day coach watching two young waddies' horseplay up at the other end of the car—Johnny Dean Newton and Ken Fraser. He turned and nudged Tom Turner in the ribs, pointing.

A slow smile widened Tom's mouth. He drew the back of a hand across his eyes, then turned to Mossy.

"Worked out purty swell, huh, Mossy?" he said. "Now we go back to carry on. I'm makin' yuh segundo uh the Two Links, all-around ramrod this time. Okay?"

"O—kay, Tom. That's fine—swell. . . ."

At the edge of a belt of cottonwoods at the Two Links ranch yard, Mossy sat flailing old pioneer tunes from his fiddle, an instrument he'd had shipped in from Wyoming. At his side, twanging out a rhythmic accompaniment on the guitar, sat Ken Fraser. They ripped together through the fiery strains of the *Liverpool Hornpipe,* then Mossy slashed his bow and turned, to run a hand through Ken's tousled hair.

Standing near by, lounging against a tree bole, Johnny Dean Newton got a signal from Tom Turner who came up to hand him a bottle and two glasses.

Tom poured two drinks and handed the glasses to Johnny.

"One for you, one for Mo—uh—yore Dad, son. Go ahaid. I just want to see what happens."

Johnny strode up, grinning. He handed a glass to Mossy who accepted it smiling.

"Skol—Dad!" Johnny said, lifting his glass to his lips.

"Skol—son!" Mossy tipped his glass and drank, but Johnny barely took a sip of his. He smiled and flung the glass from him, then rushed in and pushed Ken Fraser over backwards.

For a long moment the cowhands were treated to as good a phony wrestling match as they had ever seen.

Now the young waddies came up grinning, and Mossy turned to Tom Turner, grinning. Tom Turner held up his hands linking the thumb and forefinger of each hand together. It was the Two Links brand, the sign of strength, the cementing of new ties, and Mossy nodded with understanding.

Mont Lee battles to recover Leona Bruce's stolen broncs—and to save her from sudden death in the arena when range foes combine in a desperate rodeo conspiracy!

RIMROCK REVENGE

By

CLEE WOODS

One of Next Issue's Many Exciting Headliners!

A Double Romance

By BUFF BRADY, JR.

Famous Rodeo Star

How fate brought four arena folks together!

I WAS born with the glamour of rodeo in my blood. My father was one of the best trick riders and ropers in the business. He also played in dozens of western movies. With that background it was only natural for me to want to make a name for myself in the greatest of American sports, the rodeo.

I was born at Butte, Montana, on April 8th, 1918. Dad taught me to ride a horse before I could walk, and I knew all the parts of a saddle before I started to learn my ABC's.

I attended grade school in Butte; I had an old hip-shot cowpony for transportation. Then we moved to Portland, Oregon. This was in 1928, when Dad was on a picture location at Pendleton.

While the other boys were running foot races and playing baseball, I was practising acrobatics and tumbling. Show business was in my blood. I saw my first rodeo at Vancouver, British Columbia. My next was at Pendleton when I was ten years old and the die was cast, my life's ambition was fixed.

Great Teachers

There was a rodeo producer in the Northwest by the name of Strawberry Red Wall. He staged the Vancouver show, and he hired

Photos by John A. Stryker, Fort Worth, Tex.

The Brady and Berwick Rodeo Teams

Buff Brady and Ray Berwick

me to do a trick-riding act when I was eleven years old. 1929 seems a long while ago to me, but even now I can remember the thrill I experienced when other boys asked me for my autograph. I could hear them whispering among themselves when I passed.

"There goes Buff Brady, Junior. He's a real cowboy!"

A lot of folks had a hand in my bringing up. In 1931, Dad took me to New York where I lived wth the Worth family. May Worth was the greatest woman rosin-back rider in the world, and she taught me acrobatic riding. At fourteen I could stand up on a horse, bend backward and touch his rump with my forehead while the horse was running at a slow gallop.

In 1933 we moved to Denver, Colorado. I attended high school there, and also studied acrobatic dancing under the famous teacher Don Darrow. I was big for my age, and naturally I entered into high school athletics. But I went in mostly for gymnastics, and did not play football because I was too busy playing the rodeos at that season of the year.

I had some mighty good teachers while I was learning trick riding and roping. Dad was one of the best, but there were also Bill Keene, Frank Byron, Frank Gusky, and that lady champ trick rider of the world, Pauline Nesbitt.

Pauline made me work until my tongue hung out, because Pauline happened to be a perfectionist.

Among the trick ropers who taught me their trade were Louis Tindell, Bob Kalin, and Floyd Randolph. Floyd was sheriff at Ardmore, Oklahoma, and his wife Florence was a trick rider.

I had it drummed into me that smoking and drinking were bad for a cowboy athlete, and I never learned to do either. Girls interested me in a casual way, but with school work and rodeo during vacations, I was kept too busy to pay much attention.

At last I was ready for the big time, with my own perfected specialty act. One of my first big shows was the Tucson Rodeo where Jack Kinney was Rodeo boss. I did acrobatic riding, including making the difficult four-horse catch with a big loop while standing on my head. The horses would race by at a gallop.

Playing the Circuits

The big shows demanded my services before I was old enough to vote. I played at Pendleton, Cheyenne, Fort Worth, Houston, Baton Rouge, San Francisco, Mexico City, Chicago, and Madison Square Garden in New York, to name just a few.

Now I was a member of the Rodeo Cowboys of America, and I was kept busy ten months of the year. I carried two horses and a dozen changes of costumes, and my home was a dressing room at some big rodeo. All during this time, I would practice riding and roping as much as three hours a day.

I played the Eastern circuit which included Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, New Haven, Providence, and many more large cities. I played the Northwest circuit for Leo Cremer all through Washington State, Montana, Utah, Colorado, and Louisiana. The Texas and southern shows were for Verne Elliot and Johnny Mullins, who is now Chief of Police at El Paso.

Then I discovered that I could make some contest money by competing in the steer-wrestling. I bull-dogged for three years, but my teachers finally persuaded me to give it up and stick to my trick riding and roping. They assured me I'd last a little longer.

It was in 1939 that I first got acquainted with Ray Berwick who was doing a trick roping and tumbling act with his sister Maitie. Ray fascinated me, especially when he would spin five ropes all at the same time. One projected from each hip pocket, one from his mouth, and of course he had a rope in each hand.

A War—And Romance

But he had his act, and I had mine, so nothing came of it then. I went on, working occasionally with such top-notch performers as Gene Autry, the late Buck Jones, Everett Colburn, Roy Rogers, Chester Beyers, Junior Eskew, Dick Griffith, Verne and Myrtle Goodrich, Paul St. Croix, Johnny Lucas and Tad; Tom Mix and Ken Maynard.

There was romance all about me, and then it ended abruptly as the war broke out. I tried to enlist in the Army and was rejected because of some injuries which had long since healed. So I went to work in the Todd shipyard at Houston, and I stayed there for three years.

It was there that I met Ruby Williamson who was also doing her bit for Uncle Sam. Ruby was a genuine rodeo fan, and she watched me compete in the shows which were close enough to Houston. She was a good rider herself, and pretty? You can say that again, Mister Announcer.

So we worked together building ships, and I took her with me to all the rodeos. Then I noticed her doing some of my riding tricks, and natch, I gave her a few pointers. You guessed it, pardner. Romance blossomed, and we got fitted out for double harness. Ruby and I were married on Christmas day in 1945.

Now I really began teaching her to ride and rope. She loved rodeo as much as I, and it inspired us to build up a new act for both of us. We entertained service veterans, worked in bond drives, and at Veteran Hospitals. Ruby learned fast. In a year she was a trouper.

Many rodeo cowboys winter out in California near Hollywood, Van Nuys, Newhall, or the San Fernando Valley, and we were no different. Ruby and I were practising one day when a tall, dark cowboy rode in on a beautiful horse to give us "howdy." You guessed it. Ray Berwick in the flesh.

Ray Berwick's Story

"Where's Maitie?" I asked Ray, after he had tied up his horse.

Ray sighed and shook his head. "Romance," he answered simply. "Maitie just got married, and it busted up our act!"

"They'll do it every time," Ruby said with a smile. "Looks like you will have to get you a new partner, Ray."

Ray shook off his gloom and smiled broadly.

"I've been watching a little filly," he confided. "Did I ever tell you how come me to get started in rodeo?"

Ruby took the rope from my hand and gestured at three bales of hay with her chin. "Sit and rest your hands and face," she suggested, "and tell us about it. Where were

you born, Ray?"

"Down in Dalhart, Texas," Ray said. "My Dad was a boot-maker, and he used to make all of the late Will Rogers' boots. I was just a little old button, and Will would teach me a new rope trick on every one of his visits. Then he would insist on me doing them all and that wasn't easy, for Will Rogers was one of the best.

"I started in rodeo when I was nine years old at Fort Worth. Dick Griffith and I were the only boy calf riders at that show, and we got ten dollars apiece for riding the little dogies.

"Then Ted Elder took me in hand. Ted was the World's Champ trick roper in 1925-26 and 27. He was with the 101 show, and it was there I learned my tumbling from an Arab troupe who were also playing the old 101 rodeo. I've been in rodeo since 1923, and done everything up to and including riding steers.

"I remember a show at Paris, Texas. There was a big blond cowboy by the name of J.W. Harris. He was one of the best bulldoggers I ever saw. One day J.W. dogged a big Texas steer, but the critter was a stag. Harris twisted its head down, but the steer broke lose and gored J.W. Ran a horn right through his middle, and carried him around the arena three times before the ropers caught it. Harris was dead when they took him off that horn!"

Enter Susie

Ruby shuddered, and Ray looked thoughtful.

"I don't ride or rassle the steers any more," he said slowly. "I worked rodeos in Europe for two years, and I've seen some things in Spain. Fact is, when I came back from Europe, I played vaudeville in the Broadway shows in New York. I've worked with Frank Fay, Ben Bernie and Max Bear, then I joined Ken Murray's "Blackouts". I did my roping and tumbling act as a single, and that's where I met . . .Susie!"

"Ah ha," Ruby purred. "Here's where romance entered your life!"

"You can say that again," Ray agreed earnestly. "Queer old world, isn't it? Susie Crawford is a Hollywood girl, and I had to go to New York to meet her!"

"Three will get you five she's a blonde," Ruby offered. "Because you are tall, dark, and . . . handsome!"

"You wouldn't hooraw a hand, would you, Ruby?" Ray asked suspiciously. "Because Susie *is* a blonde!"

"Who did Maitie marry?" Ruby asked.

"Rennie Renfro," Ray told us. "He furnishes two hundred dogs to the picture studios, and he owns 'Daisie', the wonder dog. He sure busted up our Rodeo act!"

Two Pairs To Win

As I mentioned previously, I had worked the same shows with Ray Berwick for several years. For some reason Ray didn't seem too downcast, and I wanted to know the reason.

"Being single, you'll like as not play a single act," I told Ray, and I smiled at Ruby.

"Nuh uh," Ray contradicted. "Didn't I tell you, Junior? I'm working up an act with Susie, and she can tumble like nobody's business. We are training here in Hollywood this winter, and are trying new gimmicks I learned down in Australia and New Zealand. You remember how Maitie used to step into my cupped hands, and I'd flip her for a backward spin? I'm teaching Susie to do that number. Course she takes a few falls, but she was a dancer in show business and she's got the instinct for it. Susie bruises easy, but she heals up quick!"

"Sure," I agreed with Ray, remembering the spills Ruby had taken. "What horses are you using, Ray?" I asked casually.

"Christmas is seven years old, and Swanee is four," Ray answered proudly. "I see you still have Pal and Ty, and those four horse would work good together!"

"Did you ever think about going into a big double act?" I asked Ray carelessly. "Say two gals and two cowboys, and four beautiful horses?"

Ray looked away. "No, I never," he answered slowly, and then he smiled as he turned to me. "And may the good Lord forgive me for lying about it, Buff. You and I have been friendly competition for seven years, and that's why I rode over this morning. How about joining our acts into one unit, and booking the big-time circuits this next season?"

"Hmm, might be something in what you suggest," I said slowly, but I could already see the double team. "What do you think, pardner?" I asked Ruby.

"You'd love Susie," Ray interrupted, and he began to sell Ruby a bill of goods. "Susie can ride and rope, and she's as pretty as a

new red wagon!"

"Bring her over tomorrow and we'll try a routine," I told Ray. "And wear your hat so's we'll know you!"

Polishing the Routine

That was more than a year ago, and the double team clicked from the start. We worked at Art Hudkins' place in North Hollywood. Art is a brother to Ace Hudkins, the prize-fighter, and Ace never took any more punishment in the prize ring than the girls took in the riding ring.

I remember the day we started to practice the back flip. Ruby put her right foot in my cupped hands, and kept on spinning her rope. I gave her the old heave-ho, and she landed flat on her back.

I'm not going to repeat what Ruby said, but she got up and stepped into my hands for another try. She did the flip perfectly, but for a week she kept saying:

"*My* ACHING *back!*"

We finally got the routine polished up and loaded the four horses in the trailers. We previewed the act at San Angelo, Texas, and the producers watched us work. Our first big rodeo together was at Fort Worth, and we went on from there to play all the big-time shows.

Madison Square Garden was the longest show we played; fifty-three performances. From there we went to Boston. Ray and I continued to practice as much as three hours a day, and the girls were right in there pitching with us. Susie and Ruby took to rodeo like ducks take to the watering trough in a barnyard.

The girls never tired of riding in the Grand Entry, and they loved the colorful costumes. They'd sit on the fence and watch the saddle-broncs spill out of the bucking chutes, and they never missed a go-around in the calf-roping. I got to watching Ray and Susie, letting on, of course, to be minding my own business.

Now you take a cowboy and his horse. You take ham and eggs, and I'll have a double order of the same. Or take day away from night, and what have you got? Only half the act. That's the way it was with Ray and Susie. Ruby would nudge me slyly and point to the third finger of her left hand. I don't know whether Ray noticed this going on, but he finally got up his nerve while we were playing Madison Square Garden.

We saw them one day when Ray and Susie got exclusive and took a booth alone in a restaurant. Ray started to whisper and Susie had to move closer to hear what he said. Ray carelessly put an arm around her, and that was the picture. The time, the place, a gal in his arms, and like they say in the story-books:

"And so they were married!"

Glamour and Romance

Romance of the rodeo? You can say that again! There is nothing that can equal the glamour and color of a big rodeo. The bucking horses, the big Brahma bulls, the fleet-footed calves, the specialty acts—it's got everything! To all four of us, these were just the props on a big stage in which we were the principal actors. We had found a romance all our own!

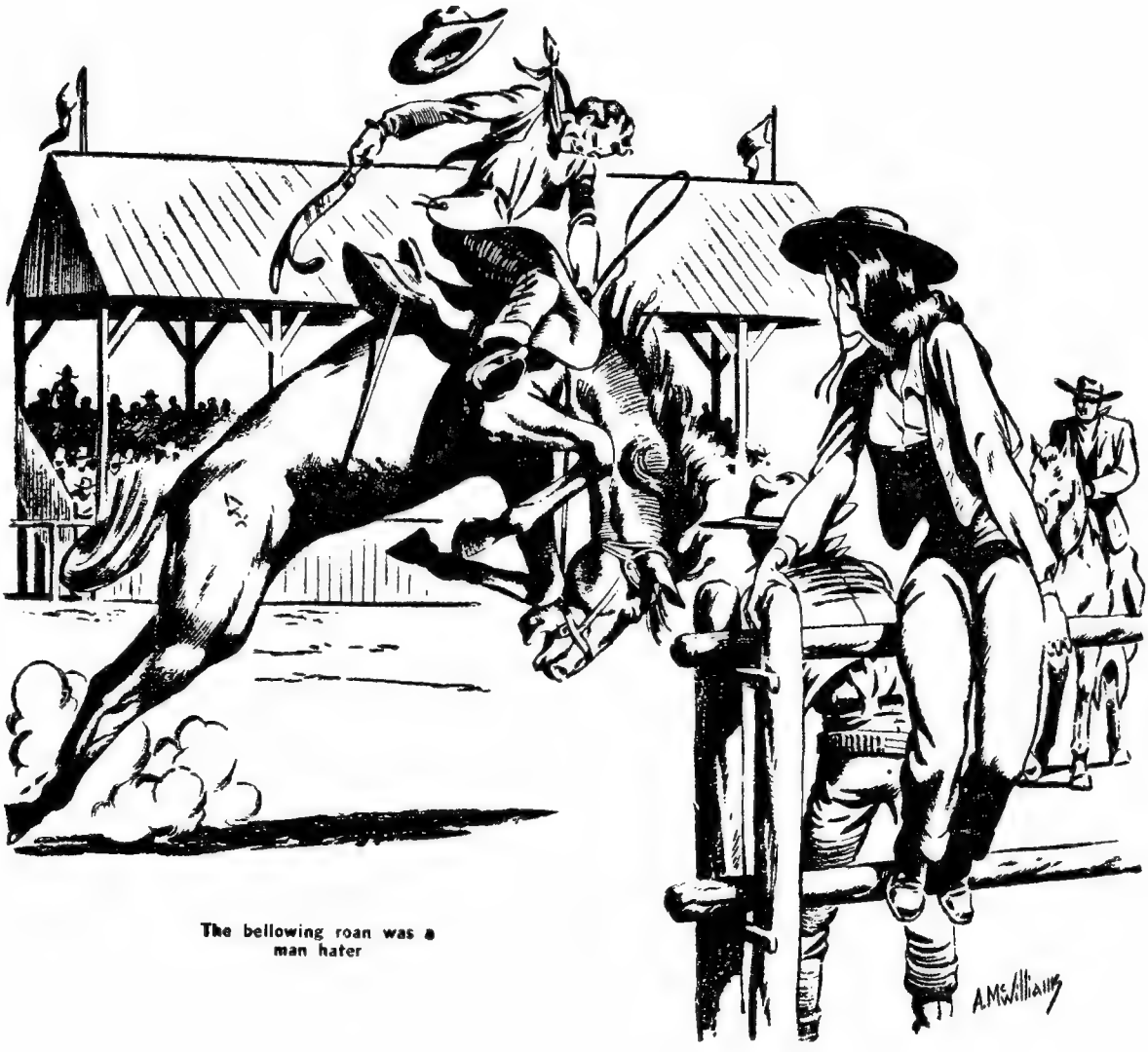
There were new places to visit, and old ones to re-visit. There is a fraternal spirit among rodeo contestants that you won't find anywhere else. Each one is a tophand athlete, with a personal interest in everyone else connected with his profession.

Berwick and Brady is what you might call a family act. Ray and I both have rodeo in our blood, and we've played the big time theatres as well. Ruby and Susie have the same background, and we all love the open range when the rodeo season is over.

The girls can both rope calves in fast time, and some day we are going to build us up a cattle spread out in the back country. And we aim to have something running around the house besides a white-picket fence.

It's a great life. Take us for example. Like every other American boy and girl, we all wanted to be cowboys and cowgals. So we are! Or take this trick-riding and roping act of ours. Getting right down to cases, it's what you might call. . . . A Double Rodeo Romance!

BANDIT FOR A DAY, a fascinating novelet of the rangeland by STEPHEN PAYNE, and many other entertaining novelets and stories by popular writers in the September issue of THRILLING RANCH STORIES—now on sale, 15c at all stands!



The bellowing roan was a man hater

Leather Throne

By CLIFF WALTERS

Threatened with the loss of his girl and everything that he held dear, Bill Bronson figured the play and got busy!

TALL, yellow-haired Bill Bronson had covered a lot of territory on his rangy sorrel in the past two days. But now his destination was in view. Less than a mile away the noonday fires of Green Swale sent feathers of smoke curling up into the cloudless May sky. Bill, choosing to imagine that smoke as signal fires welcoming him home to the tiny foothill town founded long ago by his grandfather, old Buffalo Bronson, didn't ride on into town.

Leaving the road and crossing terrain where he had once herded a bunch of town cows—for fifty cents a day—he made his

way up to an old cabin standing at the lower edge of a hillside pasture. Before the open doorway of that dirt-roofed abode he halted, grinned and bellowed in stentorian tones:

"Come out, Sliver Smith! And with your hands up!"

A gray, wizened, dessicated-looking little man appeared, not with his hands elevated, but with a smile on his leathery face.

"You can disguise yourself," Sliver Smith said, "by showin' up in a clean shirt and straddlin' a new horse, Wanderin' William, but if I was deef, dumb and blind I'd still know who'd be surroundin' my cabin about dinner time. That same hemp-haired herder of town cows that used to graze his bell-janglin' beasts up here about biscuit-makin' time every day."

Suffering his hand to be gripped by a grinning, handsome visitor, Sliver added his welcome.

"Glad to see you, Bill. Even if I did write you a letter the other day tellin' you not to come up here."

"Stop joshin' me on an empty stomach," Bill answered. "You couldn't any more put on a ridin'-ropin' shindig in Green Swale without me than nothin'."

"They ain't goin' to be any ridin'-ropin' shindig, nor any Buffalo Day celebration in Green Swale," Sliver Smith interrupted. And he wasn't smiling now. His dark eyes were somber, his drawl edged with bitterness. "Look up there in my pasture. Three head of horses. My old gray team and my buckskin saddle pony."

BILL looked puzzled.

"But I got *one* letter from you," he said. "You told me to come up here. Told me you had several head of buckin' horses. Good ones."

"I did—then," Sliver replied morosely. "I aimed to fatten 'em up, buck 'em on Buffalo Day and then sell 'em to the fellers that put on that big contest over at Agate City every year.

"I borrowed money from the bank in Green Swale to buy 'em, though. I thought I was gettin' the money for ninety days, but Banker McQuade didn't understand it that way. A few days ago he come and took the horses and sold 'em to Jim Cavanaugh, that owns the Diamond X outfit up on Sink Crick."

"What does Cavanaugh want with outlaw horses?"

"He's goin' to turn part of his outfit into a dude ranch," Sliver answered. "He's built quite a few new log cabins up there. Now he's talkin' about stagin' a shindig up at the Diamond X. And on the fifteenth—Buffalo Day."

"He can't do that to Green Swale!" Bill said, and his blue eyes had a glint in them. "My old granddad started Buffalo Day long before Jim Cavanaugh ever heard of this country! Why don't the town folks r'ar up and tell rich Mr. Cavanaugh that they don't want it like that."

"Maybe 'cause they *do* want," Sliver said. "Cavanaugh saved their town for 'em. Stable your horse, Bill, and I'll tell you what's happened durin' the year you've been away."

Later, eating dinner with Sliver Smith, Bill learned why Green Swale was abandoning its annual celebration this year. Only last month the very small town had been threatened with extinction when a group of reclamation promoters, working with certain state officials, had selected as a site for a large irrigation reservoir the large swale which an old buffalo hunter had founded as a town site. A reservoir designed to furnish irrigation water for several thousand acres of range land now known as Salt Sage Bench.

The citizens of Green Swale had fought the project and had declared the land of Salt Sage Bench unsuitable for the growing of crops. The reddish-gray land contained a high percentage of gypsite, soil that powdered to the fineness of flour—and melted away when water struck it.

Yet, the citizens of Green Swale might have been forced to abandon their little town if it hadn't been for rich, influential Jim Cavanaugh, owner of the biggest cow outfit on the range. Cavanaugh, who lived on Sink Creek, some six miles to the northwest, had come to Green Swale's aid. He had brought pressure to bear, had exposed one of the reclamation promoters as a crook, and had routed them all.

"Folks feel mighty grateful to Jim Cavanaugh," said old Sliver Smith. "You can't blame 'em, Bill. And, on top of it all, he's goin' to put on a real rodeo for 'em this year. Not the shabby little old shindig you and me's staged for 'em the last two-three years."

"We did the best we could with what little we had to do with," Bill said bitterly. "If Ira McQuade and his one-horse bank had got behind us— Why couldn't Cavanaugh put

this wonderful show on in Green Swale?"

"He's got new wranglin' corrals and chutes built for the delight of dudes that'll be patronizin' him some day," Sliver replied. "He can do things in style, Bill. He's even got a schoolhouse out at the Diamond X now, so kids belongin' to his ranch hands don't have to ride to and from Green Swale. Uh—Rita McQuade's teachin' out there this year."

"Rita?" Bronson echoed quickly. "She told me last May that she was goin' to teach in Green Swale."

"Cavanaugh paid her a little more money."

"That's fine!" Bill said shortly. "This way she can be real near young Larry Cavanaugh, who takes over as cattle king when his fast-figurin' old dad vacates."

"Now don't rile up like cotton canaries ketched in a whirlwind," Sliver soothed. "I shouldn't have mentioned Rita, knowin' she's a particular friend of yourn. And that you've allus felt a little hostile toward the Cavanaughs—datin' back to the time old Jim Cavanaugh lost you your job of herdin' town cows."

BRONSON'S face hardened.

"I haven't forgotten the trick he pulled on me," he replied. "Cavanaugh told the storekeeper that he'd seen me practicin' ropin' the merchant's roan milk cow out in the hills. But he hadn't. Jim Cavanaugh was sore because I was grazin' the town herd on some extra good grass over by Pinto Springs. Grass that Cavanaugh wanted to grab for some beef steers he aimed to hold there later on. He couldn't scare me away from there, so he got me fired."

"And done you a favor," Sliver said. "You went lippity-lopin' away on your old roan pony and found yourself a man's job, with a man's wages, with a big outfit that paid you, instead of fired you, for swingin' a lariat. A big outfit that's payin' you extry good wages right now for bein' their top bronc stomper."

"After sayin' a quick hello and goodbye to a few old cronies over at Green Swale, I'll be gettin' back to my bronc stompin'," Bronson answered unhappily. "Darn you, Sliver. Why didn't you send that last letter in time to stop me from trailin' a hundred miles? I'd ought to turn you upside down and hammer you into a prairie dog hole."

"I wouldn't blame you, Bill. And maybe it'd be worth it—just for the chance to see you again."

Bill was touched by the huskiness in the voice of this lonely, luckless man he had known all his life.

"Shucks, Sliver," he said, "what's a hundred-mile ride when there's such biscuits as only you can make waitin' at the end of the trail?"

Unfortunately, Sliver Smith's grub supply was so depleted that he could offer little except biscuits in the way of food. That was why Bill, in the late afternoon, saddled his sorrel and rode toward Green Swale. He would buy a gunny sack of grub for Sliver. And some smoking tobacco.

Memories crowded in upon the wayfarer making his way toward the little town where he had been born. Rising from the turf stood Death Monument, the huge, chimney-like rock into which a runaway team had once crashed, killing Bill Bronson's parents. That monumental rock cast a long shadow at this time of day, a shadow that remembered all too well.

Down in the verdant swale, at the edge of the somnolent little town, stood the old stone cabin that Bill's buffalo-hunting grandfather had built, and which Bronson still owned. Long ago Bill had dreamed of building onto that enduring structure. Maybe he and Rita McQuade, the banker's dark-eyed niece, would— But that was a long time ago, it seemed.

Bill now noticed two wagons standing near the stone cabin. And two men loading some crudely-built benches into those wagons. Bill rode toward the scene, looked hard at the two workers—beefy, round-shouldered dark men who bore a strong resemblance to each other.

"Excuse my curiosity, Jailbird Jig and Jailbird Jug," he said. "But what's the Keltner brothers doin' so far away from Sweetwater County?"

"Gettin' a new start. Workin' and makin' an honest livin'—if it's any of a bronc stomper's business," said Jig Keltner who, when he was drunk, would try to dance while his brother sat by the jug and tried to clap big, unclean hands in rhythm.

"The bronc stomper from that buzzard roost they call the Pine Tree outfit!" growled Jug. "The dirty outfit that accused us of sellin' some of the supplies we was freightin' out from the railroad for 'em!"

"Yeah, and had us jailed for it!" Jig rumbled. "Well, we're workin' for a decent layout now, Bronson. The Diamond X. And we don't want you showin' up and blabbin'

them crazy nicknames at us."

"And maybe I don't want you haulin' these old benches away from here. Benches Sliver Smith and me built for some buckin' contest customers three years ago."

"Larry Cavanaugh told us to haul 'em out to Sink Crick," said the elder Keltner. "And orders is orders. If you've got anything to say about it, talk to Larry. There him and his pretty young schoolmarm comes right now!"

BRONSON turned and watched the approaching riders. Riders mounted on fancy palomino horses. It was trim, brunette Rita McQuade who called, "Bill!" and came dashing forward.

"Hello, Rita," Bill said rather gravely, and took the girl's extended hand.

"Hello, Bronson," Larry Cavanaugh said shortly. Then, cool gray eyes turning to the Keltner brothers, he added, "You fellows are surely taking your time about hauling a few broken-down benches. I hope you haven't been up to the saloon again."

"Did you ask Sliver Smith about takin' these benches?" Bill asked husky young Larry Cavanaugh.

"I told Larry that I'd ask Sliver," Rita cut in, her smile gone. "I'm sure it'll be all right with him—if it is with you, Bill. Surely *you* won't be using them this year. You must have heard that the Cavanaughs were holding a real rodeo up at the Diamond X day after tomorrow—the fifteenth."

"So Sliver told me—after tellin' me about banker McQuade takin' some buckin' horses away from him. It looks to me like your uncle kinda bamboozled Sliver on that horse deal."

"I'm not responsible for my uncle's banking policies," the dark girl answered quickly. And firmly.

"We must be gentle with Buckaroo Bill," Larry Cavanaugh smilingly reminded the attractive girl. "You can't blame him too much if he makes it a point to come home once a year and show the folks what a whale of a bronc stomper he's gettin' to be."

"Go head, boss. Take some wind outa Bronson's sails!" gloated one of the Keltners.

"Yeah," said the other. "We seen a bay bucker spill Bronson so hard once that he—"

"You saw the bay bucker fall with me," Bronson interrupted. "But you two—Jailbird Jig and Jailbird Jug—was so drunk that evening you couldn't tell bald eagles from butterflies. Still, drunk or sober, you ought to be able to hold down a job at the Diamond X. The high and mighty Cavanaughs have to get along with such help as can stand bein' barked at."

"You're not being very complimentary to Rita," Larry said. "She's been on the Diamond X payroll for quite a few months."

"A smart banker's niece should be able to see beyond her next pay check," Bill retorted. And immediately regretted it.

Face flushed, Rita said, "You're a fine one to be railing at the Cavanaughs, Bill Bronson. I'm sure your old grandfather, Buffalo Bronson, would be proud of you. Jim Cavanaugh battles to save Green Swale—the Bronson town—from a gang of avaricious land sharks. And this is the way you thank Mr. Cavanaugh for his trouble! You're disappointed because the people of Green Swale are going to see a *real* rodeo on the fifteenth. And that *you* aren't going to be the whole show!"

"He can try to show off a little—if he can slap down a pretty stiff entrance fee for the riding or roping or whatever he imagines he can do best," said Larry Cavanaugh. "A fee high enough to keep the rank amateurs from boring our guests."

"I'm sure that Mr. Bronson, even if he can afford the fee, won't have the nerve to appear at the Diamond X," Rita said. "Not after the way he's spoken about the Cavanaughs."

Bill wanted to reply that his attitude was justifiable, that he had lost his first job because Jim Cavanaugh had lied about him. Instead the buckaroo stiffened, spoke curtly.

"Excuse me for bein' on the wrong side of the fence, Rita. So long."

As Bill rode away he heard the jeer of one of the Keltner brothers.

"You sure *did* take the wind outa that bronc stomper's sails, folks!"

Bill rode up to old Charley Coe's little store. Plump Mr. Coe, an easy-going old timer, greeted his customer.

"Well, if it ain't the grandson of Green Swale in person! Wandered back to the old waterhole—to make everybody glad!"

"Not everybody," Bill answered lightly. He looked around the familiar store, and grinned.

"I see you've swept the place out since I was here last, Charley," he said.

The two men bantered back and forth,

Then Bronson, ordering grub enough to fill a gunny sack, began reading a neatly hand-lettered poster which heralded the Diamond X rodeo.

"Fancy writin' and mighty fancy prizes, eh?" said Charley Coe. "Rita done all that printin' with her own little pen. She sure can—"

"I'm goin' to pay you an extra twenty," Bill interrupted. "Credit you can let Sliver Smith use up after this sack of grub's gone."

"That's mighty good of you, Bill," said the storekeeper soberly. "It'll sure help Sliver out for a while. I sure hate to see him lose his place. The good pasture land and all."

"How come?" Bill asked quickly.

COE explained that Sliver had hired men and teams and had taken a contract hauling building logs for Jim Cavanaugh. But Sliver, a range veteran instead of a lumber jack, had miscalculated. He had been obliged to borrow five hundred dollars from McQuade's bank. And now McQuade held a five-hundred dollar mortgage on that pasture land.

"I'd hate to see Sliver leave here," Coe said. "Yeah, as much as he'd hate to. But if you know where he can get a job, you'd be doin' a kindness to take him with you when you leave, Bill. He used to make a livin'. Lately, everything he's touched has turned out wrong."

"Thanks for tellin' me, Charley," said Bill. "Sliver was either too proud, or too ashamed, to. Many's the meal he dished out to me when I needed 'em. He ain't goin' to starve if I can help it!"

Bronson didn't mention finances when he returned to the cabin of his leathery-faced host who objected to a guest's furnishing his own grub. Bill switched the conversation to the rodeo at the Diamond X.

"Accordin' to the poster in Coe's store," he said, "they're goin' to pay some heap big prizes, Sliver. Two hundred for the buckin' first money. A hundred and fifty for the steer ropin'. And even a hundred for the winner of the mile horse race."

"Yeah, but them entry prizes," Sliver said. "They're pretty steep."

"The Cavanaughs are sure spreadin' themselves," Bill went on. "Furnishin' teams for free rides to everybody in Green Swale that ain't got their own transportation. Furnishin' free beer—whisky if you want it—free barbecue beef and even stacks of fried chicken. And free ice cream for the kids."

"Yep." Sliver grinned. "Not much like our little one-horse shows, eh, Bill? Shucks! Everybody'll go from miles around—the old, the young, the hungry and thirsty. I sure wish you'd stick around and go, Bill. If for nothin' more than to see Rita McQuade. I know mighty darned well she'd like to see you."

"You could be wrong about that, Sliver. Judgin' from the way she acted today."

"You seen her?"

"Her and Larry Cavanaugh. On their fancy palominos. A well-matched and handsome pair," Bill said. Then added, "Those palominos."

"Sorry, Bill," Sliver answered in a low voice. "With things the way they are, I guess you wouldn't enjoy goin' to that rodeo."

"I'm goin', though," Bronson answered. There was a glint in his blue eyes, a purposeful expression about his firm jaw. "You know how I always liked fried chicken and ice cream. I've got a stomach too strong for even the Cavanaughs to turn."

"Something tells me you've got a pretty stout heart, too, Bill," said old Sliver Smith warmly. "Anybody that hadn't knowed you as long as I have could hardly tell you might've taken a pretty stiff jolt today. Still, a man that makes his livin' stompin' broncs learns to take jolts."

Bill changed the subject.

"Before somebody accuses you of havin' one of your gray work horses cached under your hat, and with only the tail hangin' down," he said, "let's cut your hair, Sliver."

Sliver was eagerly agreeable. Bill was performing his sartorial exercises outdoors when Rita McQuade rode up. "I didn't have a chance to tell you, Bill," she said, "that I've just recovered the spur you lost one day when you were guarding the town herd on out Salt Sage Flat. The day your spur strap broke and you were thrown off a black bronc. Here."

"Gosh! Thanks a thousand times," Bill answered. "It was one of my dad's spurs, you know, and— Who found it?"

"A young man who's helping survey some oil land," replied the dark girl. "He happened to be up at the Diamond X the other evening. When I told him how I'd helped you hunt and hunt for that missing spur—and that you still treasured the mate to it—he parted with the souvenir he'd rather

wanted to take back east with him when he left Wyoming."

"Good for you, Rita!" said Sliver. "That's about all Dave Bronson left to his son—a pair of spurs and his good looks. Get off your fancy palomino and set a while."

"Sorry," said the dark-eyed girl. "Larry's waiting for me."

She was gone as quickly as Bill had ridden away from her today. Bill's gaze followed her. Then the tall young man looked down at the old spur in his hand.

"Good for the oil hunter, whoever he is," he said. "But he'll never find any oil under this land around here. Not accordin' to what a mighty disgusted old geologist, that had come up here on a wild goose chase, told me once. He said oil structures around this range was scarcer than pearl-handled wheelbarrows."

"One of 'em told me the same thing last fall," Sliver said.

THE morning of May fifteenth saw a grand exodus from the little town of Green Swale. When Bill and Sliver passed through there at ten o'clock, the door of every building was closed. The only person in sight was the banker, Ira McQuade, a sallow, slim-built man, who was just climbing into a buckboard.

Sliver said to Bill, "Folks is goin' to have to take up a collection and buy Ira a new derby hat and frock coat some day, since both black articles are turnin' green with age."

"Maybe that dollar hawk likes 'em green," Bill answered. "They look more like paper money this way."

"Or maybe, in that get-up, he aims to make a few dollars puttin' on a clown act today," Sliver replied. "Still, I guess he's got more right to laugh at me than I have to laugh at him."

"You fellows going to the rodeo?" McQuade called.

"Yeah," Bronson answered. "I'm kinda curious to see whether those buckin' horses you fast-figured Sliver out of can really wampoo."

"Business is business!" the banker snapped.

"And nobody can say that you ever let mercy or decency interfere with *your* business," Bill answered. "I can't savvy why you'd be drivin' your own outfit up to the Diamond X when you could've had a free ride in one of Cavanaugh's rigs."

"Maybe they wouldn't let him take all that baggage along," Sliver said, pointing to the banker's buckboard. "Are you aimin' to fill all them grips with free beef and fried chicken, Ira—when nobody's lookin'?"

"How would you two popping-off paupers like to mind your own business?" McQuade retorted angrily. He climbed into the buckboard and drove toward Sink Creek, six miles away.

Bill and Sliver, the latter mounted on his buckskin cowpony, Moccasin, followed at a more leisurely pace. And they watched, farther up the winding road, the dust of a dozen more rigs rising into the morning air.

Sliver turned to look back at Green Swale.

"Now I know what a ghost town looks like," he said. "Not a soul in sight. Plumb deserted. Well, we'll be about the last ones to reach the Diamond X."

"And the first ones to leave, I hope," said Bill a bit grimly.

"We don't *have* to go," Sliver said.

"I'm afraid we do," the tall, lean-hipped buckaroo answered.

"Why?"

Bronson grinned. "Free fried chicken and free ice cream."

"And Rita?"

Bill was silent as he held his rangy, light-hoofed sorrel back to the pace of the little buckskin. A stout, wise little horse that could turn into a yellow streak, and turn around on a dime, when the occasion required.

The two riders were within a mile of the Diamond X when they met a team and wagon coming down the road. On the seat of that wagon hulked the brawny, slate-eyed Keltner brothers, Jig and Jug.

Bill Bronson frowned, started to rein his sorrel out of the road. Then he changed his mind and reined the sorrel back to block that dusty thoroughfare.

"Get outa the way, you would-be bronc stomper, or I'll run over you!" called Jig Keltner, who was driving the black team.

Bronson quickly flipped a loop into his much-used lariat.

"If you don't want me to toss a loop on you and yank you about forty feet off that wagon, Jig," he warned, "you'd better shed that fancy pair of leather cuffs you're wearin'. The same cuffs I lost from the Pine Tree bunkhouse when you and Jailbird Jug was workin'—or drawin' wages—there."

"Take 'em off!" Jug said to his brother nervously.

As the younger Keltner scowlingly obliged, Bill went on.

"Funny that you two lovers of celebrations —and free drinks—would be drivin' *away* from Sink Crick. How come?"

"We're headin' for the railroad—to get a load of rock salt," Jug Keltner said haltingly. "Cavanaugh pays us to work, not to celebrate."

"That sounds reasonable," Bill answered, reaching up for the cuffs Jig extended. The wagon continued on its way. The two horsemen rode on.

"If Cavanaugh's sendin' them two apes after salt," Sliver said, "why ain't each of 'em drivin' a four-horse team?"

"They're not goin' after salt," Bill answered. "The Keltner brothers are up to something. I wonder—What kind of locks has Frenchy LaRue got on his saloon door in Green Swale. Unless he's hauled *all* his liquor up to the Diamond X today."

"You think the Keltners might be on a lootin' expedition? Well, if they'll steal cuffs, they'll steal anything. I'd sure hate to see 'em bust into Charley Coe's store."

"They've got to be watched!" Bronson said. "They're bad actors, and they're up to something. Much as I hate to, I'd better forget about that rodeo, and start trailin' a pair of apes. I've got a six-shooter in my saddle pocket here. And some shells."

"Give it to me!" Sliver said. "You claim you've *got* to go to that rodeo. Well, I ain't. I'd rather prowl after the Keltners, now that you've got my curiosity all whetted up to a razor edge."

"Be careful," Bill warned, handing over the gun.

Sliver grinned and said, "You should've give that advice to the Keltners. See you at Sink Crick, Bill."

THERE was a big crowd on the bank of Sink Creek, a nice stream which swirled under a bluff a mile below the Diamond X buildings—old and new buildings sufficient to resemble a town. Bill didn't ride up to the noisy picnic grounds at the edge of the grassy pasture land where the rodeo would be held. He stopped several hundred yards downstream and let Chief, his beautiful sorrel horse, graze on the verdant bank of a stream that swirled into oblivion.

Bronson was staring moodily into the water and thinking about Rita McQuade when a movement among the cottonwoods on the opposite bank attracted his attention. Then he saw Jim Cavanaugh, iron-gray, tall and firm of jaw, advancing toward another man, a stocky fellow garbed in khaki clothes and high, laced boots.

The two men met, knelt on their knees and examined a large paper the stocky man had unrolled. Then the stocky man walked downstream, from whence he had come. And Jim Cavanaugh strode toward the camp ground where many excited guests were congregated.

Minutes ticked by. Bill heard a twig snap. He turned quickly to see Rita standing there. Rita, very attractive in a tan riding outfit, and holding a tin plate piled high with fried chicken.

"I saw you turn in here," she said. "I don't know why you couldn't have come up to the picnic grounds, Bill. They're all your friends up there."

"Except the Cavanaughs," he said. "And Ira McQuade, your uncle."

"You eat this chicken," she said. "I helped prepare it, I can't understand your actions, Bill. If you felt you weren't wanted here today, why did you come?"

"In the hope of winnin' a little money," he answered.

"Money!" she said tensely. "Are you admitting that all your strange pride isn't as great as your greed?"

"Let's say my pride ain't as great as your uncle's greed," he answered, blue eyes unwavering. "McQuade's about to rob old Sliver of his place. If I'm lucky enough to win some money here today, maybe I can help old Sliver out—not that he knows that I know about the fix he's in! Sliver Smith happens to be my friend. *One* that I can bank on to the end.

"That's why I swallowed my strange brand of pride and came here today. It wasn't because I craved the feel of Cavanaugh's filthy money. But please don't tell anyone I'm makin' a bid to be fine and noble —even if you believe me, Rita. As far as the Cavanaughs are concerned, they can believe I'm just a sulkin' coyote tryin' to sneak up on a little glory when the time's ripe."

Tears had welled to the girl's lustrous eyes.

"Coyotes like chicken," she said, her tones unsteady. She set the tin plate down, said "Good luck, Bill!" and was gone.

Just an hour later a dozen riders were

going to the post for the mile free-for-all race. The favorite for that race was Golden Boy, the showy, well-blooded palomino ridden by Larry Cavanaugh. As Bronson and his sorrel started toward the line, Rita ran up and said in a low voice:

"I'll be cheering for your sorrel and Sliver —and you, Bill!"

"Don't be offering sympathy to Mr. Bronson and his sorrel cayuse before I beat 'em, Rita!" whooped Larry Cavanaugh.

Then a gun cracked. A dozen horses leaped into action. Larry's palomino, a quick starter, shot into the lead. The crowd roared. A lanky black horse was second. A wiry bay, ridden by a youth, was third. Bill and his sorrel were fourth when the field swept around the half-mile turn at the far end of the grassy pasture.

Then, running easily and smoothly, Bill's sorrel passed the slowing bay ridden by the youth. Began to gain on the lanky black, then forged ahead. But Larry Cavanaugh's palomino was nearly three lengths ahead.

"Come on, Chief!" Bill prayed.

The sorrel, ears flattened, nostrils flaring, sped on. He began to gain on the flying palomino. And from the crowd there burst a roar.

"Come on, Bill! Come on, Bill!"

Bill came on. The sorrel's head was at the palomino's flank—even with Cavanaugh's stirrups. Then it was stirrup to stirrup and Larry Cavanaugh was desperately quirting his horse. Quirting and spurring—and watching Bill Bronson sail over the finish line a full length ahead, to the cheers of the crowd.

BRONSON only half heard the congratulations directed at him. He was watching Jim Cavanaugh and Ira McQuade, who, having climbed to the top of a knoll some little distance from the rodeo grounds, were standing there staring off in the direction of Green Swale.

Bareback bronc riding was the next event. Bill drew an old brown mare that merely teetered around and refused to buck. He demanded another horse. Larry Cavanaugh angrily told him that if he didn't like the rodeo stock, he could leave.

The crowd booed young Cavanaugh mildly. And Charley Coe, storekeeper, had a suggestion.

"Hitch the old brown mare back on the plow, boys!"

Nettled, Larry Cavanaugh shot back a retort.

"Admission's free here, Coe. If you or anybody else don't think they're gettin' their money's worth—"

Louder boos greeted this explosion of temper. Then boos were drowned as a man with a megaphone announced the calf roping.

Nine contestants entered that event. Larry Cavanaugh, one of the best ropers on the range, was the eighth contestant. Mounted on a small gray horse for this event, Cavanaugh easily beat the preceding contestants by several seconds.

"Looks like *this* prize money'll be kept in the family," Bronson heard a spectator remark.

Bill was up next. He wished he were mounted on Sliver's nimble little buckskin horse, Moccasin, as he had planned to be. He hadn't done too much roping off the fleet sorrel which had just won a grueling race. Suddenly Rita was riding alongside Bill and talking to him.

"Throw your saddle on this little black horse that I bought last fall, Bill! He's a top rope horse!"

Bronson needed no urging. And, two minutes later, he had no regrets. As the released calf came tearing out of the chute, the trim-built black sprang into action before Bill could even touch him with the spurs. Bill's whirling rope snaked through the air like a striking serpent, snared the hard-running calf. And the knowing black horse stopped on his haunches as the agile rider, making a long leap from the saddle, grabbed, threw and tied his calf.

Again a wild cheer went up for the victor—Bill Bronson. He, thanks to the quick black horse, had beaten Larry Cavanaugh's time by several seconds. Larry didn't like it, either. He was spurring his gray pony toward the spot where Rita was holding Bill's sorrel. Bill headed for that same place. And arrived there—just in time to hear Cavanaugh's comment.

"Doublecross me by loaning your black horse to that range bum!"

"Yeah, shame on you, Rita!" bellowed Charley Coe, who had partaken of free beer. "Whose payroll are you on, anyhow?"

The crowd laughed. Bill looked at Jim Cavanaugh and Ira McQuade standing on a knoll.

"What are those two doing up there, Bill?"

Rita asked in a low voice. "I've been watching them."

"So have I," Bill replied. "Thanks for the loan of your horse, Rita. Thanks from both me and old Sliver."

"Why isn't he here to watch you perform?" the girl asked. "He'd be so proud of you! As proud as I am!"

"You?" Bill swallowed hard. "I can't savvy what's happened, Rita. An hour ago I thought we'd drifted miles apart. Then, all of a sudden—"

"All of a sudden you started digging in the word rowels. And woke me up to the point where I could see the difference between gold and brass, Bill Bronson. I'm thankful you inherited a pair of spurs! Now, they're announcing the bronc riding. Stay with 'em, Bill! I'll watch over your sorrel horse."

Bronson was no longer deadly grim. He was spiritually bolstered up by the support a dark-eyed girl was giving him, both by deed and word. Splendid rider that he was, the bright-haired buckaroo needed all the support he could muster when, following two riders who had been thrown, he came out of the chute on a big roan horse called Grave Digger. A stout, Roman-nosed brute that had been in the string Sliver Smith had lost to the banker of Green Swale.

The bellowing roan, a man-hater at heart, drew a gasp from the crowd as he soared upward into that first twisting, leather-popping leap. Two more leaps, more vicious than the first, and Bill was still up there. The roan started to spin, and with such speed that Bill, who had ridden many a spinner, could hardly keep his head clear.

Then the roan shot up into the air again, bellowing more savagely than ever. The jerk of fierce kicking loosened Bronson slightly in his saddle. But he was never off balance as, time after time, the bucker twisted into the air. Bill was still scratching with both free-swinging spurs when the roan recognized his master. Then the fury of the storm was over, and pickup men came loping to claim the victorious rider.

THE wildest cheer of the day went up for Bronson, cheers that would have drowned completely the applause won in a horse race and roping contest. Later, there were boos when a Diamond X rider named Ross Calhoon was awarded first money for riding a showy but not too hard-bucking pinto horse.

"That's the judges' decision! And it's final!" bellowed Larry Cavanaugh angrily.

"Who says them three hired men of yourn are judges?" hooted a spectator. "There's an easy way to tell whether Calhoon or Bill Bronson made the best ride. Let 'em switch horses—as Rita McQuade here suggests!"

"Yeah!" shouted another. "Let's see Bill ride the pinto and Calhoon ride the roan—if he dares!"

"Do it that way, Larry!" shouted old Jim Cavanaugh sternly. "Let the crowd enjoy as much show as we can give 'em! That's what we brought 'em out here for, isn't it?"

"All right," his son agreed. "Both buckers have got their wind. Saddle the pinto up for Bronson!"

Bronson rode the showy pinto easily. Much more easily and gracefully than Calhoon had done. But Calhoon didn't ride the Grave Digger—not after the roan's third jump. Calhoon was thrown hard.

Bill was collecting his prize money when a familiar voice spoke at his elbow.

"Good for you, Bill!"

"Sliver!" said the buckaroo. "Where—"

"I'll tell you all about it—through that megaphone!" Sliver yelled. "Don't let nobody stop me!"

Sliver grabbed the megaphone. "Folks," he yelled, "if you'd like to know why the Cavanaughs staged this free rodeo and picnic today, I'll tell you! They wanted every livin' soul to leave Green Swale so a couple of apes named Jig and Jug Keltner could sneak down there and burn the town—*your* town! Yeah, and another dear friend of yourn was in on the deal—Banker Ira McQuade! Take a bow, McQuade—you bank-lootin' coyote!"

The crowd was stunned as Sliver continued.

"Bill Bronson guessed the Keltner brothers was up to no good. That's why he sicced me onto their trail. And it's a blessin' he did. If he hadn't, they wouldn't be a buildin' left in Green Swale right now. The Keltners, usin' coal oil furnished 'em by Cavanaugh, was all ready to make a bonfire outa Green Swale when I walked up behind 'em—packin' Bill's old six-shooter!"

"Pay no attention to Sliver Smith!" yelled Jim Cavanaugh. "He must be crazy drunk! Shut the fool up, Larry! Don't stand there like a wooden Indian!"

Larry Cavanaugh made a run at Sliver. He didn't reach him. Bill Bronson was in the

way. Young Cavanaugh tried to knock Bill out of his path. But he didn't hit him hard enough. Bill landed a right swing, a left—and another jaw-cracking right.

Ranch hands and cowpunchers of the Diamond X rushed to the aid of Larry Cavanaugh—and on old Jim Cavanaugh's orders. But the townspeople of Green Swale, led by Charley Coe, rushed to the aid of Bill and Sliver. And now there was more excitement on the bank of Sink Creek. Women screamed, children shrieked and fists thudded.

BRONSON went down as the rider he had defeated, Ross Calhoon, struck him a blow on the back of the head. But Bill came up, floored Calhoon with another jaw-cracker—and tore away after Ira McQuade, banker, who was running toward the buckboard he had tied in the trees. Before Bill could catch and drag the frantic, pale-faced banker back to the chutes, the Green Swalers, led by Sliver Smith, were in charge of the situation.

And Sliver, who had quietly driven a black team into the grove during the excitement of the bucking contest, now went and got that wagon. A wagon in which lay two securely-tied men. Men who admitted to the angry crowd that they had been hired to burn the town of Green Swale.

"But why?" bellowed Charley Coe, nursing a split lip.

"So a big reservoir, one that'd irrigate Salt Sage Bench, could be built where Green Swale is now," quavered Jug Keltner. "Them surveyers workin' down on the Flat ain't been surveyin' oil land. They've been surveyin' ditches for Jim Cavanaugh and McQuade."

"A fine friend of Green Swale *you* proved to be, Cavanaugh!" thundered wrought-up Charley Coe. "Savin' a town from a bunch of reclamation sharks so *you* could do the same thing they was *tryin'* to. Divert Sink Crick over to the swale, store the water—and bilk a lot of land-plowers that wouldn't know Salt Sage Bench wasn't farmin' land.

"So that's why you had your little party today! Well, the fried chicken was good. But, thanks to Bill and Sliver, your goose—and McQuade's—was cooked along with the chicken!"

"Don't look so ashamed of an uncle that looted his own bank before it was to be burned, Rita," said a plump woman gently. "I know the only reason you took a job teachin' school out here was that you couldn't stand your uncle's home—and ways—no longer."

"I'm ashamed of being so—so unalert," quavered the tearful girl. "Living among a pack of scheming wolves that would have burned a town to get it cheap."

"How should an angel know what the wolf pack was thinkin'?" asked Sliver Smith. "And she is an angel, ain't she, Bill?"

"I thought so when she staked me to a ropin' horse today," answered the buckaroo. "Come on down to the crick, Rita, and we'll wash the tear stains out of your eyes." He smiled. "And some of the knuckle stains off my face."

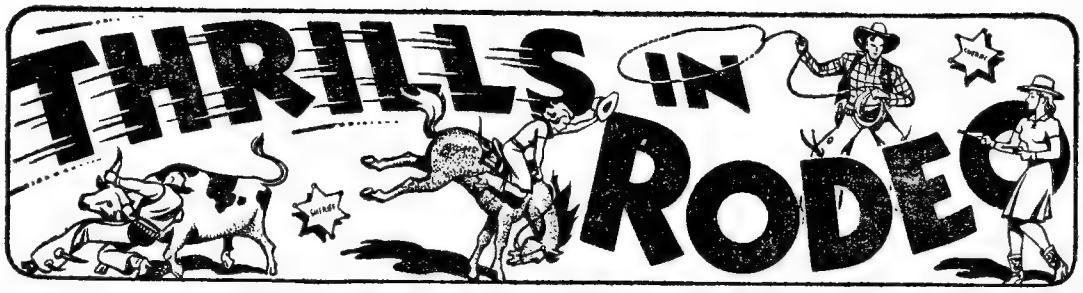
The two of them were soon sitting beside a singing stream. Bill had his arm about Rita's waist. And her lustrous dark eyes, aglow with a light this handsome buckaroo had dreamed of seeing there, told him that he was winning a far greater prize than he would ever win by balancing himself in a wildly-rocking leather throne—a saddle atop the storm deck of an end-swapping, sun-fishing outlaw.

196 PAGES OF SIX GUN THRILLS!

Featuring three top-flight action novels by the West's most famous writers—THE BAR 20 RIDES AGAIN, by CLARENCE E. MULFORD; A MAN FOUR-SQUARE, by WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE, and THUNDERBIRD TRAIL, by WILLIAM COLT MacDONALD, in the Fall issue of—

TRIPLE WESTERN

NOW ON SALE—TWENTY-FIVE CENTS AT ALL STANDS!



Arena Highlights by FOGHORN CLANCY

AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS RODEO EXPERT

TILLIE BALDWIN WINS THE BRONC RIDING

THE FIRST big rodeo to be staged in the eastern United States was at the Sheepshead Bay Speedway in 1916. It was put on in grand style, for there were $50,000 in prizes and cowboys and cowgirls had gathered from every part of the western U.S. and Canada to compete.

There were two classes in the bronc riding contests, one for hobble riders and one for slick riders. In the hobble riding contests the girls tied their stirrups together with a strap running under the horse's body, or strapped each stirrup to the cinch.

In slick riding the girls rode just like the men with stirrups free. Thus they were able to scratch their mounts like the cowboys and spur them on to much greater bucking. This made it a much harder ride all around, for in addition to the wilder bucking of the horse, the girl had to stay in the saddle and move her feet in a kicking motion as is necessary while spurring.

With hobbled stirrups the rider had a much better anchor. All she had to do was stick to the saddle and keep her toes turned outward which preveted her boot from sliding out of the stirrup. Of course, even with that the girls frequently were thrown, for a bad horse would put on such a furious performance that the girl's head would be popped back and forth until it would seem that her neck would snap.

Both styles of riding were plenty dangerous, the slick style from the fact that the rider was much more likely to be thrown; the hobbled riding from the fact that if the horse fell, as it sometimes did, the rider had less chance to kick his stirrups free and get clear. Hobbled riders were sometimes pinned under the horse.

Yet hobbled riding was considered safer and more girls entered it than the slick contests. In this Sheepshead Bay rodeo there were more than a dozen girls in the hobbled riding trials and only a handful in the slick.

Among the contestants was a girl named Tillie Baldwin who had, it seemed, every card in the deck stacked against her. In the

first place she was not a native; she had come to this country from Norway, which does not have a cowboy tradition as part of its way of life. In the second place she had learned to ride on the bridle paths of Central Park, in the shadows of the New York skyscrapers.

Old timers shook their heads and opined that no girl who was not born on a ranch and who did not grow up with horses could stand a chance against the bad buckers and

the top competition she would meet at rodeos. Tillie Baldwin heard the gossip, but she paid it little attention. She entered the slick riders contest.

This was not only considered sheer suicide, but certain failure. For only the very best girl riders entered the slick contests and thus Tillie was competing against the best in the country.

The other girls admired her nerve, but did not give her much chance to win prize money.

But the girl from Norway fooled them all. Day after day she won the daily contest and kept piling up points for the finals and the big prize.

On the last day she drew a horse called "Cyclone". This was a cayuse to scare even the men. Not half of the cowboys at that contest could have ridden that whirling dervish. Nobody there believed Tillie had a chance; it was a foregone conclusion. And of course if she was bucked off Cyclone she would win nothing of the final purse.

Tillie fooled them again. She rode Cyclone to a hair-raising, wild, screaming, fanning finish and when that ride was over there was not a soul in the arena who was not ready to take off his or her sombrero and admit that Tillie Baldwin was one of the greats of all time.

She had won the World's Championship in the girl's slick riding contest, considered an even greater honor than the championship won by Prairie Lillie Allen, who had won the title in the hobble riding contest.

BRYAN ROACH RIDES FOR A LITTLE SPOTTED PONY

UP FROM Texas had come young Bryan Roach with his lovely wife Ruth, for the Elk's Championship Rodeo in Chicago. This was during the Elk's convention in 1920 and Tex Austin had planned a big rodeo in a special arena on the lake front as the high spot of the convention.

Bryan was a member of the Elk's lodge at Fort Worth and was representing his lodge in the rodeo. His special dish was bronc riding and he was already beginning to garner a reputation in bronc riding circles, being pointed out as one likely to go to the top.

His wife Ruth was also entered in the cowgirls' bronc riding and there was a special reason why they were anxious for at least one of them to win at Chicago. Back in Texas, they had a friend named Tom L. Burnett, millionaire oil man and owner of the big Triangle ranch. Burnett knew that Ruth had her heart set on owning a very fine spotted pony named Bobby. The price was $750 which was more than Bryan or his wife had. Burnett happened to overhear her telling Bobby's owner regretfully, that she did not think she would be able to scrape up that much money.

"Tell you what, Ruth," said Burnett. "You win your bronc riding contest in Chicago and I'll buy that pony for you. Or if either one of you win I'll buy the pony for you."

So in addition to the prizes and the thrill of winning, Ruth and Bryan came to Chicago determined to win that spotted pony.

Ruth got off to a good start and for several days led her field of girl bronc riders. Then, two days before the finish of the contest she came near being bucked off and had to "grab leather" which disqualified her and put her out of the finals with all chance gone to win.

Bryan, who had gotten away to a much poorer start, had been catching up. He was about fifth in points when Ruth dropped out, so she turned her sole attention to encouraging him and trying to spur him on to win. She hadn't yet lost hope for the pony.

Reluctantly she had wired Tom Burnett when she was disqualified, but she had told

him in her wire that Bryan still had a chance. On the final day, just before Bryan's turn came up, they received a telegram from Burnett saying that he had ordered Bobby brought to the Triangle Ranch because he was so sure Bryan would win.

Bryan drew a horse called "Square Deal" for his final ride, which was one of the toughest, hardest buckers in the entire Eddie McCarty bucking string. Bryan was now in second place and it was a cinch that he would either win or lose out entirely, because the horse was good enough to put him in winning position if he were able to ride the time limit. Few cowboys would have been able to stay with a horse as tough as Square Deal.

Outwardly calm, but inwardly in a turmoil, Bryan climbed the chute fence and dropped into the saddle. He gathered and measured the reins, pulled his hat down tightly and uttered the classic words of the bronc rider:

"Let's have him and see if I can ride him!"

The chute gate flew open and 1200 pounds of dynamite on the hoof catapulted into the arena. As the horse bucked and whirled and spun, applause thundered from the stands and high above the roar of the crowd came Ruth's soprano scream:

"Ride him for me, honey!"

Bryan Roach stayed with that horse though he was pounded and whirled and snapped until he could scarcely see or hear. And then the gun went off and he had won his ride. A few minutes later came the announcement that he had won the championship.

The check that Bryan received for that ride was $1500—twice as much as the pony was worth. But it is one of the curiosities of human nature—Bryan Roach made that ride, not for the much bigger check that was to be his, but for the little spotted pony that his wife wanted. Greater love hath no man.

LORAINE JACKSON WINS—AND LOSES!

DOWN Texas way, Slim Jackson ran a little wild west show—what is commonly called a "bronc show" in the Lone Star State. This type of show usually has a clown and a trick mule and perhaps a little

fancy roping. Most of the performance, however, is made up of bronc riding and bull or steer riding. And usually such shows advertise that they will ride any bucking animal brought in to them from the surrounding country. Some exceptionally good bucking horses have been discovered by rodeo people through these little bronc shows.

Slim Jackson had a daughter named Loraine who was just about as tough a slip of a cowgirl as ever graced the arena. She rode bucking horses and steers and bulls. She was not afraid to tackle any animal brought in, having been reared on that little bronc show. She was a great rider before her ability was known outside the few sections of Texas where the show usually played.

In 1931, Slim Jackson was temporarily out of business due to Slim's illness. Loraine found herself with nothing to do and hearing of a rodeo at Duncan, Oklahoma, decided to run up to the Sooner state and see if she could pick up some prize money. Though she was already a seasoned rider she had never entered rodeo contests and they were new to her. Still, she knew she could ride and felt she might be able to win a share of the prize money.

Arriving at the rodeo alone, she found there was to be a steer riding contest for girls and as this was her specialty, she entered the three day contest. She won first prize in the day money the first day. The second day she won third prize which left her a few points ahead of the other girls for the finals.

"Who is this Loraine Jackson?" people asked.

Nobody knew. Even the cowboys did not know her. Yet a strange thing happened. Loraine happened to be on one side of a parked car and a conversation between a

group of cowboys was on the other side. She could not help hearing one cowboy ask that same question:

"Who is this Loraine Jackson?"

"Who knows?" answered one of the cowboys. "Nobody ever heard of her. She's been lucky these two days, but she won't win the finals."

"You sure about that?" asked another cowboy. "That little gal comes from one of the toughest bronc shows in Texas. She's a real rider and I'll bet you any amount she wins the finals."

"I'll take that bet for fifty dollars," said the first voice.

Loraine found out that the cowboy who had bet on her was named Tack Bolton. He was an up and coming rider who had begun to make a name for himself in the rodeo arena. Gratefully, Loraine made herself a promise that Tack Bolton would not lose his money.

Promises are usually easier to make than to keep. The steer that Loraine drew for that final ride did everything but turn handsprings and would have done that if he had thought of it. But she stayed on, though it took every ounce of strength and stamina she possesed and she was exhausted when the ride was over.

Tack Bolton left the chutes and went out into the arena to meet her as she came back after her ride. As they walked back the Judges pronounced her the winner and Tack, jubilant, tried to get her to take half the fifty dollars he had won. Loraine refused.

"The money's yours," she said, "and I think it was your having enough confidence in me to bet on me that made me win." And she told him how she had overheard that conversation.

A year later, Tack and Loraine were married at Burnett, Texas. They followed the rodeos together until Tack was called into service. Then Loraine gave up the circuit and went to work in a war plant as a welder, so she could do her part. Tack was killed in the battle of the Bulge.

Loraine finished out the war as a welder but now, alone again, with her cowboy sleeping on foreign soil, she is back in the rodeo arena. And if she rides a little more wildly and recklessly than she did that first day in Duncan, Oklahoma, it may be that it helps, as much as such things can ever help, to erase the sorrows of the past.

OLE RICE TAKES A CHANCE

FEW people would class cowboys as smart business men. They're supposed to be pretty harum-scarum, plungers with their money and their lives. A smart business man would never think of doing what Ole Rice did.

Ole ran across a small group of stocker steers that he could buy at a reasonable price and he felt sure he could make some money by fattening them on the lush grass of his little rented ranch.

Ole had no money, but there were banks in the business of lending money, so Ole borrowed, bought the cattle and then had only the problem of paying off the notes. He could think of only one way to do it—to play the rodeos in the hope of winning enough prize money to make good.

For nearly three months Ole had lots of luck, but it was all bad. He won a little here and there and it all went for expenses and entrance fees and he was no closer. Meanwhile the due date of the note was coming closer and closer. It was only a week away when Ole Rice came to Nebraska's big rodeo at Burwell.

Ole entered the steer wrestling. Day money and one first in the finals would give him all he needed and he was plenty anxious

as he lined up for his first trial. Maybe he was too anxious, for he overleaped his steer and missed.

Luckily he was not hurt. He was up like a

rubber ball, caught his horse, mounted again and was after the steer again. This time he caught and threw the critter but the clock had ticked on and the time was 67 seconds. Charlie Colbert won the prize that day with a time of twelve and two fifths.

The steers in this rodeo were so heavy and wild that any time from 12 to 18 seconds was sure to be in the money. Ole did better the second day, he took first. The third day he won second prize and the fourth day he won first prize again. There was an extra steer for those in the finals.

Colbert had done consistent bulldogging all four days, landing either in the money or near it, but because of Ole's boner the first day, Colbert was ahead of him when the big final try came up.

In fact, Colbert had a lead of ten and three-fifths seconds, which is a terrific handicap to overcome on one trial.

However, Ole had an unexpected inspiration driving him on. Ole had met a girl, Nellie Moore of Burwell, during the rodeo and she was lending him sweet encouragement and telling him never to give up. That kind of encouragement was more than medicine to Ole Rice's spirits.

Colbert went first and ran into bad luck. His steer was bad and wild and it took him 22 seconds to down the critter. This chipped something off Ole's handicap, but not much. He would have to throw his steer in eleven and three-fifths seconds just to win a tie.

But Ole never batted an eye. He clenched his jaw and waded in. His notes at the bank rode on his shoulders, but the sweet words of Nellie Moore gave strength to his arms. He slammed his steer down in 10 seconds flat to win the contest, his bank loan, and they say—a wife as well. At this writing the word isn't definite, but the whispers are whispering that Nellie Moore is going to be Mrs. Ole Rice.

Next Issue's Main Attractions

ACTION thrills abound in MOUNTAIN RIDER, the featured novelet by L. P. Holmes in which rodeo rider Lee Shelly finds himself the victim of a frame-up which puts him in disgrace. Surrounded by doubt and suspicion, having lost the trust of the girl he loves, Lee leaves town—with a promise to come back and square accounts! How he does so is told in this glamorous novelet which will hold you enthralled.

* * * * *

RIDING in the rodeo for what is to be his last time as a contestant, Herb Lingle, "Champion All-round Cowboy," knows he MUST win — for many more reasons than one—in YOUTH IN THE SADDLE, by Stephen Payne, a novelet chock-full of human interest and excitement!

* * * * *

ENRAGED by the sinister plot directed against the girl he loves, Mont Lee battles against odds to save her from death in the arena in RIMROCK REVENGE, a story by Clee Woods that packs drama and dynamite!

* * * * *

NEW stories of glorious true adventure in the rodeo arena in next issue's THRILLS IN RODEO department by Foghorn Clancy—bringing you dramatic "inside" accounts of the highspots in the lives of America's most famous rodeo contenders.

* * * * *

ADDED to all this, our next issue will contain many other novelets, stories and features by your favorite writers—a gala feast of rodeo fiction and fact which will provide good reading for everybody!

A Complete Novelet

Devil in

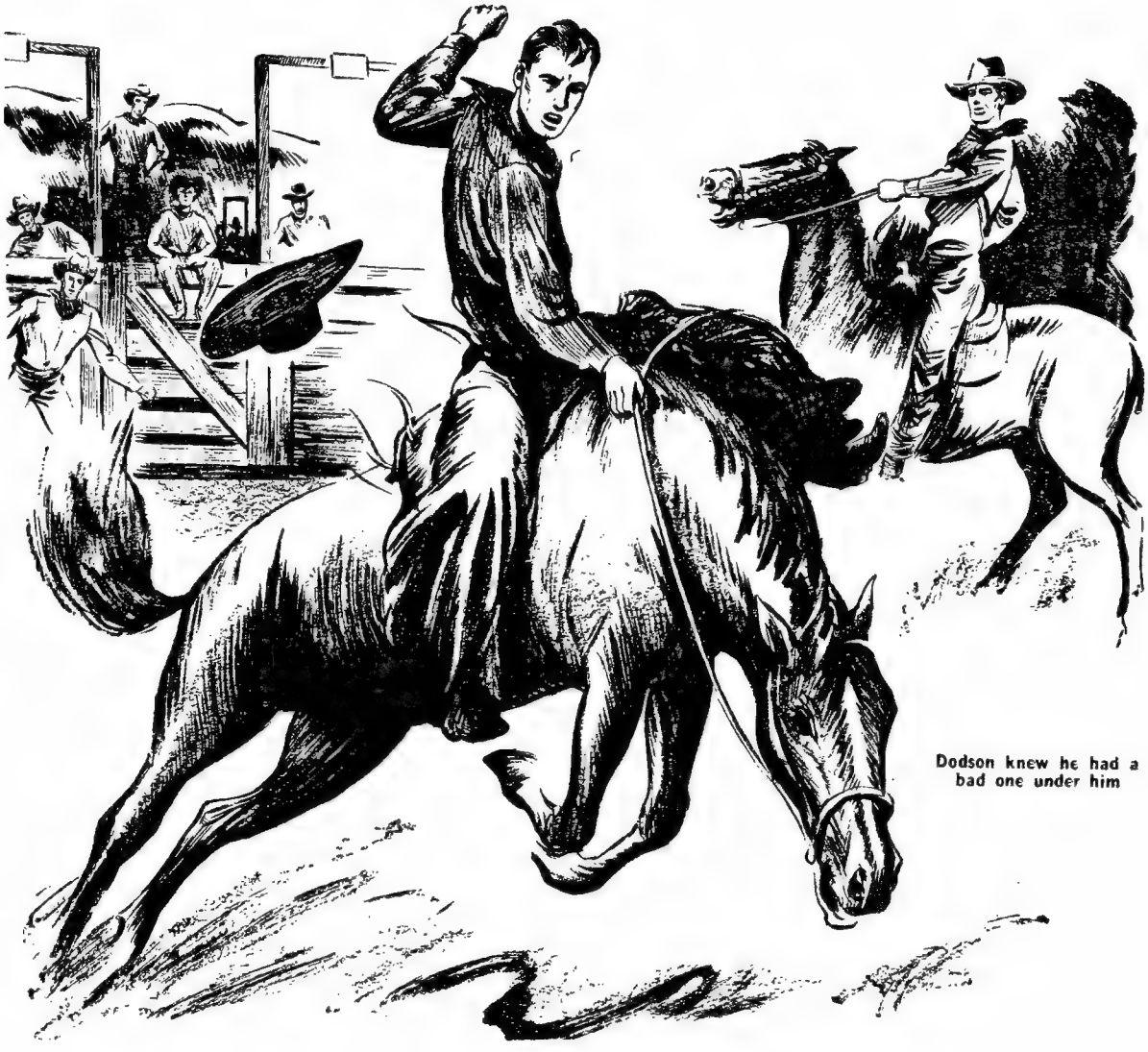
CHAPTER I

The Man Who Hated Horses

IGNORING the big "No Smoking" sign, Wayne Dodson leaned against a bale of hay near the rodeo horse corral and drew nonchalantly on a brown paper cigarette between his thin lips.

He sat easily, legs extended, ankles crossed, and he seemed lost in a sleepy-eyed study of the horses that crowded the far end of the enclosure. Dodson hated horses—hated them with all his soul. And it was ironical that his bitterness about them had led him to fame as one of the greatest and most spectacular rodeo stars ever to rowel a bronc in the arena.

The men playing cards on a hay bale at the other end of the corral did not notice Dod-



Dodson knew he had a bad one under him

the Saddle

By JOHN C. ROPKE

son at first. The game held them until the eyes of Shorty Adams saw and recognized the star. Shorty had been betting on a good hand, but now he forgot it in sudden resentment. He flung his hat on dusty ground and raised his voice above the racket of the rodeo crowd out front.

"Heck, if I'd knowed *he* was gonna be here, I'd have gone to Helena instead!"

The others looked too, then, and Slim Ordway spoke in a soft drawl.

"Wayne Dodson, huh? An' we put up thirty bucks, good American money, to enter the saddle bronc event." He chuckled wryly. "Well, there's always second and third prize money. That ain't wood, Shorty."

Cliff Knight, sitting with his back to the star, looked over his shoulder, faced front again.

"So that's Dodson," he said. "Doesn't look

GOOD SHOW, BUT THE FOLKS BOOED HIM PLENTY!

'specially dangerous, does he? I've never seen him before, but I've heard about him, naturally. He's kind of rough on horseflesh, they tell me."

Cliff was from a dude ranch in the east. He was entered in the calf roping event, so the presence of the top man of the bronc riding circuit did not disturb him. He smiled at the downcast look on Shorty's face.

"Shucks," he consoled. "What you worrying about? Dodson may draw a dud and not make any showing at all."

Shorty shook his head glumly.

"Not Dodson. Even when he draws a lemon he puts on a good show. Like that time in Cheyenne when he rode with both hands in the air."

"Yeah, that's right," the fourth man agreed. "He's a skunk in my book, but he sure can ride."

Slim fingered the short stubble of blond beard on his chin.

"Remember the old sayin'," he reminded. "There was never a horse that couldn't be rode, or a rider that couldn't be thrown. Mebbe our friend is due to find that out."

Shorty stood up, growling his disgust.

"Nuh-uh. The guy that said that never saw Dodson in the saddle." The stubby puncher picked up his hat and strode sadly toward the arena.

WAYNE DODSON climbed the chute with an easy grace. Smiling at some secret joke, he straddled the top bar and eased himself onto the hurricane deck of a deep chested, spotted gray.

Someone handed him the single rope rein, and the strong fingers of his left hand accepted it with a quick eagerness. The toes of his boots found the stirrups instinctively, and he yanked his flat-topped, narrow-brimmed Stetson tight on his brown head.

Then he nodded readiness.

The P. A. system had already announced his name, and the crowded stands waited in anxious silence. They came to their feet with a roar as the chute gate swung back and the spotted gray came bucking into the arena.

The gray was not a novice to the arena. He had been ridden five or six times before, without success, and he knew a few tricks. But with Dodson in the saddle, he didn't get a chance to use them.

Anticipating each move before the bronc made it, the rider literally pulled the horse out of his spin. Waving his right arm in perfect balance, he scratched the animal from shoulder to flank.

Dodson wore heavy, knee-high boots with the mule-ear straps hanging on the outside. They were an old style boot, long out of fashion, with an extremely pointed heel, but they served Dodson's purpose. He drove the heels into the gray with a vengeance, raking the withers and sides of the animal.

The horse snorted his annoyance, forgot his spinning and began bucking straight away. Dodson's body swung gracefully to the new cadence and his boot heels continued their work. The gray stumbled, regained his footing quickly, and went on across the arena. But with each twisting buck, the length of his stride shortened.

He was almost crow-hopping when the ten-second horn sounded. It was the signal that all riders waited for, a sign that the ride was over. Most of them grabbed the saddle horn and held on until the arena attendants pulled them from the saddle.

Wayne Dodson kept riding. He kept scratching his mount until one of the attendants rode beside him and pulled him from the saddle.

"All right, hot stuff," the man growled, "the party's over." Neck-reining his horse aside, the horseman released Dodson, letting him fall to his knees in the sawdust-covered dirt.

It wasn't until then that Dodson heard the booing of the crowd. Their catcalls of derision washed down from the stands and swept across the arena to hit him with almost physical force.

He came to his feet slowly, checked the position of the gray with a casual glance, and headed for the exit gate at an easy trot. The booing followed him until he was out of sight under the stands.

Rolling a smoke beside the calf pens, Wayne smiled in amusement. He inhaled deeply, with a sigh of satisfaction. He knew that ride would give him a first for the afternoon performance. There wasn't a meaner horse to be ridden than the gray, and Wayne had no fear of the two contestants who had yet to ride.

He didn't know when the crowd stopped booing in the stands out front. For some time now he had ignored their reaction to his rides. It had bothered him at first, but that had been two years ago when he had been a newcomer to the tanbark.

It hadn't worried him long.

"The deuce with them," he had told himself. "I'm making good money, and I'm doing what I want to do—ride horses. I'm riding them till they scream for mercy and holler quits."

The stock boss and one of his helpers walked past.

"A nice ride, Mr. Dodson," the helper said.

"Yeah," the heavyset stock boss grunted, "a doggone good ride. But wouldn't it have been easier if ya used a knife?"

The men passed on and Dodson grinned after them. He ground the stub of his cigarette into the dirt with the high, small heel of his boot and patted a calf that was sniffing him through the bars.

THE dining room of the Blackstone Hotel in Fort Worth was crowded. Some of the rodeo contestants, their gay colored shirts polka-dotting the room, batted the breeze with ranchers, salesmen, and tourists.

These few contestants who allowed themselves the luxury of an expensive meal were the money riders. Men who had taken cash prizes at their last rodeo. The not-so-lucky members of the show dined at the Milam Cafeteria down the street, or munched hot dogs and drank pop over at the fair grounds.

The overhead lights of the dining room hadn't been turned on, for the setting sun, splashing the half open windows with color, gave the room a homey, congenial atmosphere. Over at one of the windows, two strangers shared the same small table.

One of the men, a short, beefy individual in a gray check suit, finished his coffee noisily, and set the cup down with a clatter. A tourist, evidently, from the look of his peeling nose, he sat back with a satisfied grunt.

"Took in the rodeo today," he said conversationally. "Sure was a humdinger, wasn't it?"

The man opposite him, obviously a westerner from his dress, looked up from his meal.

"Sure was," he agreed, and went on eating.

The tourist took a cigar from his vest pocket and fingered the smoke thoughtfully.

"They sure gave that Dodson fella a razzing, didn't they? Funny about that, too," he went on without waiting for an answer. "Heard a lot about him before the show started this afternoon. Fella sitting next to me said he's the best horsebacker in the business. Said most of the crowd just come to see this Dodson fella ride."

The westerner nodded. "That's right," he admitted. "You see, Wayne Dodson isn't very popular with the folks. A lot of them just come in the hopes that he'll draw a horse that's just a little bit tougher than he is."

The beefy man lit his cigar and puffed in thoughtful silence.

"Knew a fighter back east once," he said finally. "Don't remember his name now, but it doesn't matter. This kid was sure some scrapper, had a punch like a sledge hammer. But he was tricky, mean. Boy, how everybody hated him! They packed the house every time he fought, hoping to see him get his brains knocked out."

The westerner leaned forward with a show of interest.

"Did he?"

The man in the check suit scratched his bald head.

"Hanged if I know," he admitted.

Wayne Dodson, sitting at the table behind the beefy man, chuckled in amusement, picked up his check and rose to go.

He thought of what the tourist had said about the fighter. "A fighter gets a share of the gate receipts," he told himself. "The bigger the crowd, the more money he makes. Does that idiot think the fighter cared a hoot what the crowd thought about him?"

Dodson strode toward the cashier's desk. Two contestants from the show sat at a table he passed, and he nodded to them. But the men didn't see him or didn't want to, for neither one returned his greeting.

CHAPTER II

Ranch Tragedy

HE WAS at the rodeo grounds before dawn the next morning. It was, to his way of thinking, the best part of the day. He enjoyed the strong smell of the stock in the pens, the impatient stamping of the horses as they waited to be fed and watered. These were the familiar smells and sounds to Dodson, the things he had known since childhood.

He sat on the top pole of the bronc corral, and studied the horses. He watched their

actions and made mental notes of their mannerisms. Horses were like people to this man, each one different. He studied them until he could almost guess what they would do under a given circumstance. This trait of his was one of the big reasons for his success, and he knew it.

As far back as he could remember, he had been studying horses and their ways. First it had been the thoroughbreds on his father's breeding farm in Kentucky. It was on this farm that his mother had been thrown by a stallion and killed.

His father had sold the farm after that and bought a ranch in the wild horse country of northern Montana. Wayne had loved that change. It had given him a new type of animal to study. They were there ten years, and the young fellow was twenty-two when his father was stomped to death by a wild-eyed killer.

Wayne had sold the ranch shortly after that and it seemed only natural for him to drift into the rodeo arena. Horses were the only thing he knew. It was strange that the thing he hated—horses—should be the thing that filled the void of his father's death and put him into the big money.

"Are you Wayne Dodson?" The soft voice gentled him from his reverie. He twisted his muscular body around and looked down. A young girl, her long blonde hair braided and pinned to her head like a halo, studied him with frank appraisal.

"That's right," Wayne admitted, "I'm Dodson, miss."

"You might at least have manners enough to come down!"

Dodson grinned and climbed off his perch.

"O.K.," he said in amusement as he stood before her. "Here I am. Are you happy now?"

The girl, on closer inspection, didn't look quite as young as Dodson had first figured. Around nineteen, maybe twenty, he thought, and she'd be a knockout if she used a little makeup. He smiled in sudden interest.

There was no answering smile from the girl before him. She wore a loose fitting polo coat, and her hand came from the pocket and she extended an envelope toward Dodson.

"I'm Elaine Brady," she said, "Pat Brady's sister. Here's the money you sent Pat last year when he was hurt. Thanks so much. It was very kind of you."

She pushed the envelope into Dodson's hand and walked away. He stared at it in confusion for a second, then overtook the girl in a few long strides.

"Hey, there, Miss Brady," he grinned, "hold up. You shouldn't go around handing money out like this. I don't know any Pat Brady. You've got the wrong wrangler."

The girl stared at him in anger.

"Now you look here, Mr. Dodson," she snapped, "I know exactly what I'm doing. My brother was hurt here at Fort Worth last year in the bronc riding event. The men took up a collection for him, and everybody's name was on it but yours. But two hundred dollars came direct to the hospital. We found out that Joe, from the hot-dog stand, had delivered it. And he said that you gave him the envelope."

Dodson remembered it then. He remembered the stocky Irish kid who had been kicked in the chest by a bucker. There had been the usual collection, but no one had asked Dodson to contribute. He had sent his own contribution, anonymous.

Now he fingered the envelope in embarrassment. "It wasn't a loan, ma'am," he muttered. "Did you pay the other men back?"

She shook her head in silence.

"Well, then," Dodson grinned, "why pay me? Your brother would have done the same if it had been me that was hurt."

Miss Brady frowned. "I'm sorry, but I don't think he would have, Mr. Dodson. He doesn't like you."

Dodson nodded and put the envelope in his pocket.

"I understand," he said slowly, "and thanks for being so frank."

The girl hesitated, her eyes softening.

"I didn't mean to say that. It slipped out. I think what you did was—very nice."

A slow grin appeared on the bronc peeler's young face. He felt he was on familiar ground now. People were, after all, very much like horses. You had to know what kind of treatment each one needed. When you understood them, they handled easy enough.

"To show me you're really sorry," he said smiling, "you'll have to have breakfast with me and prove it by being nice."

She laughed suddenly. "I wouldn't have breakfast with you even If I starved to death."

She was gone then, her shapely legs disappearing behind the corner of the corral.

MOOSE, the big roan gelding, was one of the Ralston string. It was too high at the shoulders to be straight western stock, and Dodson figured it had some blood of the Belgian strain. Probably a dash of Percheron, too, he decided, as he studied the horse and knew its weight would be over twelve hundred pounds.

Moose had a good record—six rides without one man staying aboard for the qualifying ten seconds. That record was confusing, for the animal didn't look like much. It had too much weight in the legs to be shifty, and the mild, sleepy eyes weren't too intelligent looking.

Dodson heard his name announced as he started up the side of the chute. The usual silence followed, and the rider grinned in amusement. It was funny about crowds, and he had been unpopular since his first rodeo ride in Cheyenne. Even the time he had ridden a twister in Helena with his sprained shoulder in a cast, they had booed him.

"Watch this bronc, Dodson," one of the chute handlers advised. "He's a mea.. ..ctor."

Holding both sides of the chute, Dodson lowered himself gently to the association saddle. His feet found the stirrups, and he accepted the rope rein with a grin. The mount beneath him tensed, and he felt the horse quiver, felt the pent up power of the animal.

"Watch him," the handler advised again, and Dodson nodded he had heard.

The man at the chute gate thought the rider had nodded his readiness and the gate swung open. Instantly the roan was in motion, leaping for the open arena, his big body slamming into the half open chute gate and driving it back.

Wood splintered and Dodson felt a sharp pain in his right knee. Angrily he realized the roan had deliberately hit that gate to knock his rider from the saddle. Once in the clear, the horse opened his bag of tricks. Stiff-legged, he jumped clumsily into the air, landing with a brutal, back-wrenching jolt.

Dodson winced in pain and yanked at the rein to get the brute's head up. His legs began their instinctive scratching motion, and each movement of the right knee made him bite his lips in agony.

The animal's head remained down between his forelegs, and Dodson grunted in surprise as he yanked again without result. Then suddenly Moose was spinning to his left. He stopped with the abruptness of a ballet dancer and tried to kick out the ceiling lights a split second later. He came down to earth heavily and spun to his right like a Fourth of July pinwheel.

But he could have saved himself the effort, for his rider was no longer in the saddle. Wayne Dodson was sprawled full length in the dust of the arena floor. The stands came to their feet with a roar, and for the first time since Dodson had joined the circuit, the crowds were roaring approval.

For a second, as he lay there, Dodson thought they were cheering him, and a warm glow deadened the pain of his right knee. Then he realized they were cheering the horse that was still bucking his way across the arena.

Something changed in Dodson then. He sensed it as he pushed to his feet slowly and limped, unaided, across the arena to the exit gate. There was no resentment for the horse, only a dull feeling of surprise. Dodson had ridden a dozen horses equally as tough as the roan. He had ridden them to a standstill and had laughed at their efforts to unseat him.

What annoyed him was the fact that he had figured the horse wrong. He had underestimated his opponent, had taken his own ability for granted. He had been warned about the horse, and should never have been caught napping in the saddle. A year ago, even six months ago, he would have anticipated the roan's charge into the gate and would have had his leg back over the cantle.

Yet, Dodson knew the horse would probably have thrown him without the injury. It was just that the roan had more on the ball than he had figured.

But the big change went deeper than that. It was the effect the crowd had had on him. Previously he had never been conscious of the stands. Had never cared whether they booed or cheered. He hadn't given a hoot whether they liked him or not. At least he *thought* he hadn't.

Now, he knew he had been kidding himself. That warm glow he had felt when he thought they were applauding him convinced him of that. He paused now at the exit gate and turned, facing the arena.

The stands were still on their feet, their roars of approval still thundering across the ring. Attendants were trying to haze the roan back under the stands, and were smil-

ing at his efforts to avoid them. They were smiling, when ordinarily they would have been cursing the beast's antics under their breath.

Wayne Dodson grinned and saluted the horse with a nod of his head. He turned to go under the stands and Shorty Adams handed him his hat.

"A tough break, Dodson," Shorty said. "Are you hurt?"

"Hurt?" Dodson grinned. "Heck, no."

Shorty shrugged. "We can't stay on top forever, boy. It's no disgrace to be thrown by a dynamite stick like Moose."

"Dynamite stick, my eyebrow!" Dodson said. "He's as gentle as a lamb. I just fell asleep in the saddle."

CHAPTER III

That's the Verdict

THE elderly doctor with the goatee and the pot belly snapped his worn bag shut with finality.

"That's the story, Mr. Dodson. Stay off that leg for a few weeks and you shouldn't have any further trouble. But if you have any fool notions of riding bucking horses again, you'd better get them out of your head. If you hurt that knee again you'll be a cripple for life."

He strode to the door like a soldier on parade.

"See you in a few days," he said. "We can't do much for it until the swelling goes down."

Dodson nodded and watched the door close. He threw back the sheets then and stared in disgust at his injured knee. It was swollen all out of proportion, and he cursed savagely. In the same black mood, he called room service and ordered a bottle of rye.

Three weeks later the Fat stock show opened at El Paso, and Dodson was there. He walked with a slight limp, but he wore the same grin as always. The only noticeable change about him was his boots. He had changed from the old style mule-eared type to the wider heeled, lower cut boot of the rodeo ranny.

He hit town a few hours before the show parade and had time to pay his entry fee and rent a horse for the ride up Main Street. He rode in silence, among men he knew, and few returned his curt nod of greeting.

Late that afternoon he drew his horse for the next day's show, and spent the rest of the evening at the bronc corral studying Buzz Bomb, his scheduled mount. He had ridden the horse once before, in the Pendleton show, and knew the animal well. A good straight away bucker, who always put on a show.

The next morning, instead of going down to the corrals as was his custom, he remained in his hotel room massaging his knee. He worked the liniment in well, kneading the surrounding muscles, and by show time the injured leg felt limber and fit.

When his name was announced that afternoon, an excited hum came from the stands. He grinned, knowing what they were hoping for, and lowered himself into the saddle with the same old assurance. He took the rein with confidence, and nodded his readiness without delay.

The chute swung open and Buzz Bomb snorted and went into the arena. There was no trickery here, no display of finesse. The wiry chestnut just put his head down and bucked. He went across the ring in a series of short hops and the rider swayed to the erratic movements with professional rhythm.

His muscular legs swung like pendulums, scratching in the old motion. But there was no bellow of rage from the chestnut, no quivering of raked muscles from the broad, blunt heels of the new type boot.

Suddenly the horse stumbled, pitching forward on his knees, and Dodson's legs stiffened, bracing against the stirrups in an attempt to prevent pitching over the mount's head. And his right knee buckled under the strain.

Buzz Bomb's stumble was momentary, for he regained his feet instantly and went on bucking. But Dodson had lost cadence. He had lost that precious balance so necessary to a rider. He slid out of the saddle and over the chestnut's rump. As he struck the tanbark, the horn blared in his ears.

He came erect at once, checked the position of the chestnut with a wary eye, and then headed for the chutes, beating the sawdust from his pants with his hat as he went. He was halfway there when he realized the stands were quiet.

He didn't understand it, not until he

reached the chutes and saw the faces of the men looking at him. One or two even smiled sympathetically.

It was clear then. These men thought he was through, washed up. They thought his confidence was gone, that the Moose in Fort Worth had knocked the props from his pedestal. That's what the stands thought, too. They didn't boo him now, or cheer Buzz Bomb for throwing him.

The idea made him chuckle. The stands felt sorry for him. He looked around at the sea of faces, the sunlight shining on bald heads. He breathed deep of the arena odors. "Cripes," he said half aloud, "what a bunch of fools!"

HE DIDN'T have a mount the next day, but on the following day he rode a rangy black named King Cole. It was one of the McNamara string of broncs, and although they didn't have the Ralston reputation for bucking, they were good mounts.

Dodson looked like a different man on that ride. He rode carefully, scratching his mount with just enough vigor to satisfy the rules. There was no forcing the horse, none of the spectacular riding that was so typical of the arena's top performer.

The crowd took the change in confused silence. Up in the judges' stand, three men pushed their Stetsons back in surprise. The members of the show watched the ride with keen interest. A snow storm in August would be taken in stride. Orchids growing on a cactus might make them wonder. But Wayne Dodson giving a cautious, conservative ride, they refused to believe.

Even when the ride was over they doubted what they had witnessed. The pickup man who lifted Dodson from his saddle stared at him curiously. He rode halfway across the arena, still holding him under the arms.

Dodson grinned. "Let me down, will you, Joe," he asked. "People will talk."

Joe released him with a curse, and reined his mount after King Cole. Dodson walked the rest of the way, studying the stands.

"Well," he said to himself, "come on, folks. What you gonna do? Cheer, boo, or go a round of chess?" He chuckled as the stands remained silent.

"A nice ride, Dodson," a lanky bulldogger said as Wayne found a space before the chutes. "King Cole was in good shape today." There was a note of friendliness in the man's voice as he spoke.

"Thanks," Dodson said casually. "I hope the judges noticed it."

The show ran twelve days, Dodson riding four buckers in all. With the exception of Buzz Bomb, he had given each mount a conservative, careful ride. From the stands he had looked no different from any of the other riders. The flash and show that had lifted him above his fellow riders in other shows was gone. He was lucky to draw third prize money.

Most of the contestants left town that Saturday night to be at the opening of the Fresno show on Monday morning. A lot of the newcomers, however, and some of the oldtimers, knowing the competition would be keen at Fresno, hit for the small shows throughout the southwest.

Dodson stayed in El Paso. He had checked carefully and found that the Ralston horses were at none of these shows. And were not scheduled to be worked again until the big show at Pendleton. Dodson unpacked his war bags and settled down for a rest in his hotel room, and if the veterinarian in town wondered why he bought so many bottles of horse liniment, he had the good sense not to ask questions.

Dodson hated the forced vacation. He had been on the move now for over two years and the long days of hanging around hotel lobbies and going to the movies galled him. It was his bum knee, and the thought of Moose, the big roan, that gave him patience.

Those four rides hadn't helped his leg any. Even the conservative ones had puffed his knee up like a balloon. He realized he just couldn't go on taking in every show in the circuit. His leg couldn't stand it. And he wanted that knee to be in good condition when he climbed on the hurricane deck of Moose again.

Endless days passed, and then Dodson read the results of the Fresno show in a stock paper. The name of the second money rider made him lay the paper down and stare at his hotel window thoughtfully. The name, Pat Brady, brought visions of a blonde-haired girl with a braided halo and flashing eyes.

That mental picture stayed with him for days. It rode with him on the long train ride to Pendleton, and was a part of him as he climbed the chute for the first ride in over a month.

The blue mare, Nasty Betsy, one of the famed Ralston string, was an evil-tempered

five-year-old. A bad habit of biting made her handlers keep their distance. She nearly kicked the chute apart when Dodson settled on her broad back.

But he rode her, and brought the stands to their feet roaring approval at the show he put on. He still rode carefully, protecting that right knee of his. But the rest had done him good, and he took the pounding jolts without wincing.

NASTY BETSY was in rare form that day. She too had had a good rest at the flying "R" ranch in Wyoming, and all her stored energy went into that ride. She sunfished and pinwheeled, kicked at the stars and bellowed her enjoyment.

The rider was still there, riding easily, when the horn sounded. He slapped the mare's rump with a grin and slid from the saddle without waiting for the pickup man. He landed running, and kept right on going until he was back at the chutes.

It wasn't until he stopped that he felt the throbbing in his knee. The men around him were smiling, and a few congratulated him on his nice ride. He was too worried, however, to realize he was enjoying their comments. He cursed under his breath, feeling the knee begin to swell, and wishing he were back in his hotel room.

It was Moose that kept him standing around the side of the arena. They were saving the roan for last now, the spot most rodeos saved for their best bucker. And Moose, since he had thrown Dodson, had a reputation.

Dodson knew the horse would put on a good show. He'd be tougher to ride than ever, and would become more difficult with each rider he knocked from the saddle. That's the way it went with the buckers. They became arena-wise, like a scarred old ring veteran who knew every trick in the business.

A young eighteen-year-old kid had picked Moose's name out of a hat the night before, and Dodson knew the boy was scared. He could see the beads of perspiration that laved the lad's face as he lowered into the saddle. Sweat plastered his thin cotton shirt to his broad back, and he licked dry lips with a nervous tongue.

Dodson had heard of the boy. The kid had made some spectacular rides in the smaller shows throughout the midwest, and this was his first trip up in the big time. It was only natural that he should be nervous.

Dodson stepped to the front of the chute and grinned up at the boy.

"What the heck you scared about?" he said easily. "Did you expect to find a bunch of broken-down skeletons in the big time, like you found in those whistle stops you've been playing?"

The kid didn't say anything, but Dodson saw his lips compress in sudden anger. He took a firm grip on the rein and nodded in determination. The gate swung open and Dodson stepped aside quickly, a wide grin on his face.

"Well," he said to himself, "at least the kid ain't scared now."

The grin faded as he saw the rider lose his balance on the second twisting buck. On the fifth buck Moose had emptied the saddle. The kid took a nasty spill, landing heavily, and he came to his feet slowly. Ignoring his hat, he strode toward the men who lined the front of the chutes.

He halted in front of Dodson, his face flushed, his big hands knotted.

"I'd have done a lot better if you'd have kept your two cents out, Dodson. Next time keep your big mouth shut!"

The easy grin left Dodson's face and his eyes went cold.

"A lot better, says you," he snapped. "You'd have fallen out of the saddle from pure fright."

Turning his back on the kid, Dodson ran a match down the chute post.

"Serves me right," he thought angrily. "I should have minded my own business." He lit his smoke, cupping his hands, and when he turned again his face was expressionless.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the kid walking down the line, his shoulders slumped in dejection. The crowd settled back laughing as Moose was finally roped at the other end of the arena and led toward the exit. And if ever Dodson saw smug satisfaction in a horse's manner, he saw it in the roan.

CHAPTER IV

With Fingers Crossed

THE incident with the kid made Dodson retire into his shell more than ever.

He avoided the other members of the show, and spent most of his spare time at the bronc corral studying the actions of the roan. He wasn't a praying man, but there were some who noticed his crossed fingers when he picked his mounts for each day's ride. They noticed his lips tighten as some other bronc rider drew the coveted Moose.

The roan was rapidly making a name for himself. Each rider knew that if he was lucky enough to stay on Moose's hurricane deck for the required ten seconds, it would go a long way toward that first prize. Yet, as the contest wore on, it became more evident that it would take considerable of a rider to stay on the big roan's back.

Moose got so he began looking forward to going into the saddling chutes. He'd shake his head and stamp impatiently on the days he wasn't scheduled to work, and other horses were roped and led from the corral. He was becoming that rare performer, a horse that liked to be ridden.

The long hours before Dodson went to the front office to draw his mount seemed endless. Each time he drew and failed to pick the roan, his anxiety mounted. He knew now that his knee would never completely heal. That each time he rode, no matter how carefully, he would have to spend hours rubbing the swollen joint so he could walk the next day.

Not that he gave a hoot about the leg. He just wanted to keep it moving long enough to carry him to the roan's saddle. That would be his last ride, his farewell ride for the crowds he couldn't understand. But unless he drew the horse soon, he'd have to quit.

The Moose was his goal. All other horses were secondary. He rode them, and rode them well, but without his old fire, his heretofore leather larruping type of ride. And the stands liked it. It got so, near the close of the Pendleton show, they applauded when his name was announced over the P. A. system.

Dodson couldn't understand the change. When he had been the top man, giving them a type of ride no other contestant could duplicate, they had hated him, booed him. Now, after his fall from the pedestal, when he gave them an ordinary ride without trimmings, they cheered his name.

He listened to the crowd applaud him on the last day of the show, when he was awarded second prize. He stood below the judges' stand and grinned at their thunderous ovation.

"The fools," he thought.

The Moose was in demand. His reputation was becoming nationwide and rodeo owners bid high for his services, knowing the crowds would fill the stands to see him in action. Most of the shows added an extra prize for the rider who stayed with the roan. That drew the top riders to whatever show he was working.

Ralston's usual habit of giving his buckers a good rest after each show was, in the roan's case, ignored to some extent. Moose liked to work, and fretted when he was away from the sounds and smells of the arena. Then, too, Ralston was a business man, and the fees for Moose's services were hard to ignore.

Dodson followed the horse from show to show, traveling to Miami when the roan was shipped there. He drew first money there, but he still hadn't drawn Moose.

He was forced to take a month's rest after that trip, for his knee got so bad he could barely walk. He went into a hospital for treatment but there wasn't much they could do for him.

"Take it easy," he was advised, "stay off the leg for a couple of months." He grinned at them and took the next train for Helena.

It was during the parade at Helena that Dodson discovered his desire to ride the roan was well known throughout the circuit. He was riding a hired mount at the tail end of the show when a stocky waddy in a light green shirt with white piping walked his mount beside Dodson's black.

"The boys are pulling for you to draw the Moose, Dodson," the waddy said. "I'd like to see you ride him."

Dodson wasn't used to having people make overtures of friendship, and he twisted in his saddle and studied the man with amusement. The waddy looked familiar and Dodson tried to place him.

"The Moose?" he asked.

The stocky man smiled. "Apparently you haven't seen this week's Association News, Dodson. You ought to read it. Folks have been putting two and two together about your showing up at whatever rodeo features the Ralston string. Shucks, man, it's no secret."

WAYNE had him placed now. The stocky ranny was Pat Brady, and

Dodson returned the man's smile.

"Your sister," he asked, forgetting for the moment what Brady had said, "is she still in Fort Worth?"

Pat's smile faded and Dodson knew what he was thinking. It was all right to be friendly to a rider who had changed for the better, and was riding his bronc in the way the unwritten law said they should be ridden. But it was something else again when that same rider showed interest in your sister.

"No," Brady said finally, "Elaine isn't in Fort Worth. She's in Helena, riding herd on me."

Dodson showed interest.

"Where you staying? At the Rainbow Hotel?"

Pat scratched his ear and chuckled.

"Funny," he said, "I don't seem to remember."

"Thanks," Dodson drawled, and he gigged his mount forward.

He looked for her in the stands the next day. He hung around the chutes, ignoring the calf roping event, and studied the faces that ringed the arena. He wasn't scheduled to ride, but Moose was going to work and that kept him around.

Pat Brady had drawn a sorrel gelding by the name of Dynamite, and Dodson was beside chute number four when Dynamite roared into the arena. He came out like a grasshopper, landing stiff-legged in front of the chute, and began to spin.

The cheers of the stands turned to groans of dismay when the saddle shifted as the cinch snapped. Pat landed awkwardly and lay in a heap in the dirt. Dynamite continued spinning, moving away from the fallen rider. Then suddenly he changed tactics and began hedge-hopping—straight at Pat Brady.

Dodson moved fast, sprinting into the arena with his hat in his hand. He jumped the crumpled form of Pat Brady and hit the excited animal across the eyes with his hat.

The sorrel dodged, knocking Dodson down with his shoulder as he turned and headed in the opposite direction.

Unhurt, Dodson came slowly to his feet to see two waddies racing across the tanbark with a stretcher. Pat was conscious when they lifted him aboard, and he cursed and tried to get up, but one of the men laughingly pushed him back.

The stands applauded Dodson's act, but the other contestants made no comment. It was all in the day's work to them. Any one of them would have done the same thing without hesitation.

It was just that Dodson was closest, and had moved first.

Standing back against the chutes again, Dodson wished he had let someone else turn the sorrel. That fall he had taken hadn't done his knee any good, and he made a mental note to call a doctor when he got back to his hotel. For already he could feel the thing swelling.

That evening, he knew the liniment wasn't going to help. It had been losing its effect for some time, and he knew he'd have to draw Moose soon or call the whole thing quits.

He wanted to ride that roan bad, but he didn't want to be a cripple when he did it.

There was a soft knock at the door of his room, and he sat up in bed. He said, "Come on in, Doc" and Pat Brady walked into the room.

Dodson had had the right leg of his trousers rolled up, and now he rolled it down with a sheepish grin. But he saw the look on Brady's young face and knew the rider had seen.

The waddy closed the door slowly and stood there, one arm resting on the high dresser.

"Just wanted to say thanks for what you did today." He chuckled and scratched his ear. "I guess I was out for a couple of seconds. Didn't see what you did, but someone told me. Thanks again."

Wayne had taken the makings off the night table, and now he paused in the act of rolling a brown paper cigarette.

"Forget it, Brady," he said flatly. "You don't owe me a thing."

"Yeah," Pat said. "O. K.—but thanks anyway."

He was halfway out the door when he paused, turned.

"That day in Fort Worth the roan threw you," he said thoughtfully. "I was in the stands that day, saw you smack the chute gate on your way out. That where you got the busted knee?"

Dodson ran his tongue along the brown paper and fingered the smoke into shape. He lit it, cupping his hands around the wooden match from force of habit, and inhaled deeply. And Brady knew he wasn't going to answer.

CHAPTER V

The Big Test Ahead

DODSON drew second money in the Helena show, missing first prize by a small point margin. He had ridden well, qualifying on each ride, and had figured on a first. But the last day of the show he drew a dud, an onion-eyed four-year-old that just wasn't in the mood for bucking. And in the scoring of the judges, the meanness of the mount was an important factor.

A year ago, Dodson would have put on a show. He'd have discarded the rein, or stood up in the saddle, or done something equally spectacular to get the notice of the judges. But this time he had played it safe, conservative.

He didn't give a hang whether he took first prize or finished out of the money. He had long since ceased getting any satisfaction out of merely being in the saddle. What his standing in the Association News was didn't interest him. He had made money, had been on top, and had enjoyed riding each bronc, letting them know he was master.

But since Moose had thrown him, his mental attitude had changed. He no longer regarded each mount as a personal enemy that he wanted to subdue, conquer. They were just horses now, broncs he had to ride to reach a goal. And that goal seemed further away than ever.

With the closing of the Helena rodeo, the Ralston string was going back to Wyoming for a rest. Their next appearance would be at the Cheyenne Blue Ribbon show, and that wouldn't be for six weeks. In the meantime, the top riders headed for the big money at Fort Worth. The riders just coming up, and those on the way down, hit for the smaller rodeos throughout the country.

Dodson went to Cheyenne and waited for the opening of the show there. He frequented the Turkish baths, consulted several doctors, and, as a last hope, sought a retired physician who had been known to do wonders for some big name baseball players.

When the show opened at Cheyenne Dodson knew it would be his last. The knee had refused to respond to treatment and he realized the stupidity of continuing. He spent his days at the depot, watching the rodeo folks embark from the trains. But there was no sign of Elaine Brady.

On the day before the opening, the Association News revealed Dodson's secret. It told of his injured knee, how he had hurt it, and repeated the story of his trail of the roan.

Dodson headed for the rodeo office and settled down on one of the long benches just outside the low partition to wait. It was just before noon that Pat Brady walked into the office. Limping slightly, Dodson approached the smiling ranny and drove a pile driver right into the stocky man's face. Pat went over the railing like a rag doll and lay in an unconscious heap.

The following morning, when Dodson got down to the corrals at dawn, there was someone waiting for him. Elaine Brady, her long hair cascading over the shoulders of her suede jacket, was there at the pens before him. She saw Dodson hesitate, and she came forward quickly. Her hand reached out for his arm, then faltered and fell to her side.

"Hello," she said softly.

Dodson was too filled with emotion to answer. He had found from past experience that rubbing the back of his hand across his cleft chin was a good way of covering his feelings, and he did this now, his eyes riveted to the hollow of her neck. He knew if he talked he'd make a fool of himself. But he didn't realize his face had taken on the bored look he habitually used as a protective mask.

"You're angry," she said defensively. "I don't blame you. I had no right to mail that story to the News. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but—"

Dodson frowned. "*You* gave the News that story?"

Elaine chewed her lower lip and nodded. "Ye... When my brother told me what he suspected, I thought it only fair to let everyone know what kind of a man you are inside. You're a difficult man to understand, Mr. Dodson. I don't think you're as indifferent as you pretend. I wanted—"

SHE flushed suddenly, realizing she had said more than she intended, and she laughed to cover her embarrassment.

"I think I really sent in that story as a form of apology for the way I spoke to you that morning in Fort Worth. I hope you'll accept it."

Dodson looked beyond the girl, studying the big roan in the corner of the bronc corral. He knew if he looked at her that he'd give his feelings away, and that was the one thing he liked to avoid. He had always preferred that people know nothing of what went on in his mind.

"I haven't had breakfast yet," Elaine said, and Dodson knew she had guessed. He grinned down at her and offered his arm with a bow.

"There's a little place just a few blocks up that serves mighty fine scrapple," he said as they left the rodeo grounds. "Nothing like scrapple for breakfast."

"I'll try to remember that," she said, and Dodson looked at her sharply.

Things were moving too fast for him. The sudden change of the crowd's attitude, the friendliness of the riders, and now the surprise actions of this girl beside him. What was behind it all? Why had they changed their opinions so suddenly? He was the same now as he was before. He hadn't changed any.

Was it because he was no longer the top rider of the business, the one rider who had never been thrown? Or was it sympathy that had changed their opinions, the natural feeling for the underdog? He gave it up with a shrug and turned his attention to the girl beside him.

That night at the rodeo office, Dodson was next to the last of the riders to draw his mount. And the Moose had not been picked. He stared at the two neatly folded pieces of paper until perspiration beaded his forehead.

He could sense the other riders watching him closely, could feel the tension that gripped the room.

"You don't *have* to draw, Dodson," one of the officials said. "We know how you feel about Moose. I guess we can overlook the rules this one time."

Dodson's eyes clouded. "No, thanks," he said flatly, and he drew one of the papers from the bowl. He opened it with a show of indifference. And casually handed his entry over to the recorder.

"The Moose it is, Dodson," the man said with a smile. "You'll ride tomorrow. Good luck."

Dodson licked dry lips and nodded.

"Tomorrow," he repeated in a whisper, and left the room. Behind him there was silence, until one of the men who was peering through the curtained window said, "O. K., boys, he just left the building."

The recorder took the last paper from the bowl and refilled it with new names from the drawer of his desk.

"All right men," he said, "let's make this one snappy. It's getting late."

He swept a pile of creased papers that had been face down on his desk into the waste basket. A few fluttered onto the floor face up, and on each one the name of "Moose" was printed!

The publicity agent of the Cheyenne show was always alert to opportunity. Even as Dodson was leaving the rodeo office building, the agent was telephoning the news of his pick to the local papers. He gave them the meat of the article that had appeared in the Association News earlier in the week, and begged for a spot in the sport section.

He got it. The editors of the papers, always on the lookout for a good human interest slant, promised him a full column. By ten o'clock the next morning everyone in a radius of fifty miles was making plans to catch the afternoon performance.

Dodson didn't read the papers, wasn't even aware of the fact that he was crowding out the baseball news. His entire attention was devoted to his right knee. He didn't go to the corrals that morning, spending the entire time in his hotel room applying hot towels and liniment to the swollen joint.

Long before the show was scheduled to start, the stands were crowded. Many of the people brought their lunches, and the warm sun filled the coatless crowd with a holiday spirit. The simplest antics of the rodeo clown brought roars of laughter, and children ran up and down the crowded aisles, pushed into motion by their excitement.

THE director of the rodeo, showing a flare for the dramatic, had placed the saddle bronc riding event at the bottom of the card. And the sun was nodding its weary head when Wayne Dodson's name was finally announced over the P. A.

A sudden hush of expectancy came over the stands as each spectator leaned well forward to watch the well-knit rider who climbed the gate of number three chute. Even the children, sensing something of the parents' eagerness, stared at the arena in awed silence.

Wayne Dodson climbed the chute with a trace of his old graceful swagger. He had

discarded his newer type boots for his old narrow-heeled ones with the mule-ear flaps, and there were some who frowned at the change.

The roan seemed to sense that the man above him was his enemy, for he snorted in sudden defiance and shook his great head. He snapped at one of the handlers through the bars, and his strong teeth splintered wood.

Then Dodson was in the saddle. He grinned and settled himself, feeling that this was his first ride since that day in Fort Worth, almost a year before. Nobody warned him this time about the roan, no one offered advice.

Dodson nodded and the chute gate swung open with a rush. For just a second the roan hesitated, his broad back hunched under the saddle, and the rider's long legs, like sensitive antennae, felt the bunching of powerful muscles. Then Moose exploded into violent action.

He went out into the arena in a twisting side motion buck that would have spilled a less experienced rider. Dodson knew that he was going to have to ride. The mount below him was a seasoned veteran, with the instinctive canniness of his kind.

Moose didn't buck with the free abandon of a wild one who was conscious only of the weight on his back. The roan knew it was a contest of skill, and he made each move coolly, with a single purpose in mind.

Dodson scratched him, roweling the sharp edges of his heels from shoulder to flank. There was no savage fury in the motion. It was a deliberate expression of hate. He kept it up as the roan continued to draw from his bag of tricks.

Blood trickled from Dodson's nose and the taste of salt was strong on his lips. The saddle became a concrete seat for his spine, and his right leg seemed to be swinging of its own accord.

Suddenly Moose lost faith in himself. He bellowed his fear and forgot his veteran tactics. He became a wild thing then, bucking without purpose or direction, his sole desire to get away from the savage fury of the man who rode him.

The ten-second horn sounded, but it is doubtful if a single person watching the amazing struggle of man against horse in the arena before them heard the sound. The pickup men sat well forward in their saddles, without a thought of interfering.

It was some time before Moose showed signs of tiring. His bucks became hedge-hops, and finally feeble crow-hops. Then Dodson gave the roan the crowning insult. He dropped the rein and raised his hands above his head to show complete mastery of the horse beneath him.

The roan reared suddenly, in a last desperate play, and hurled himself backward to crush the rider beneath his great body. Dodson slipped from the saddle and landed running, his right leg doubling beneath him to throw him forward into the dirt.

He rose slowly, within inches of Moose's kicking hooves, and limped across the arena. He was almost there before the crowd came to its feet. The din was deafening, the very ground seeming to shake from the thundering ovation. Hats filled the air, scaling down into the arena, and lay unnoticed as their owners riveted their attention on the limping figure that was leaving the ring.

Elaine met him in front of the exit, her face filled with emotion as she watched him approach. He turned as he reached her, facing back into the arena.

He saw the roan stagger weakly to its feet and stand with head down in complete exhaustion.

Suddenly he knew that he was the only one in that crowded rodeo who was noticing the horse. The Moose was no longer on top. The Moose had been ridden. And seeing him standing there, Wayne felt a strange kinship, a deep understanding.

Accused of a killing, Tony Caldwell faces the toughest spot in his life—and enlists the aid of Sheriff Sam Karnes, wily solver of range mysteries, in BURY ME NOT, an exciting complete book-length novel by Allan R. Bosworth featured in the October WEST—now on sale, 15c at all stands!

Forking dynamite, Jim Frand won for the Triple X

Rodeo Rowdy

By RALEY BRIEN

Under cover of night and secrecy, powerful forces worked against Bill Laney—but he had strength on his side, too!

IT WAS about the middle of the afternoon when Bill Laney rode his jaded pony into Mesa Creek. Along the principal street, he saw flags and banners flapping in the breeze. Teams and riding stock filled the hitch rails. The walks were thronged and Mesa Creek's merchants were doing a lively and profitable business. The annual rodeo had come to town.

Bill Laney, who was a bunkhouse hand on Henry Barland's Triple X ranch, finally found room at a hitch rail for his pony and eased his six feet of lanky young manhood out of the saddle and tied his mount. He was

wearing his "dress up" clothes, featuring a blue silk shirt, a yellow silk neckcloth and a new hat. His boots were well oiled. As he had done each year since coming to the Mesa Creek range, Bill Laney went to the rodeo in style.

He stepped onto the crowded walk and straightened to look over the crowd and see if he could locate a friend. The others of the Triple X bunkhouse gang had come to town the day before to pitch camp at the rodeo grounds.

Laney had been delayed. He had orders to finish painting the big barn. Because of a practical joke which had soured Mr. Barland, the crusty owner, Bill had received a strict command to finish the painting job before riding to town.

The first pair of eyes he met belonged to Sheriff Tom Richards. a grizzled lawman who was generally jovial but capable of sternness when necessary. "I'm glad I happened to see you dismount, Bill," the official told Laney. "I want to put a flea in your ear."

"Yeah?" Laney grinned. The sheriff did not grin back, and that was bad. The officer seemed to be having one of his serious moments. As they stepped out of the thick of the crowd and to the curb, Sheriff Richards continued:

"Laney, you're a rowdy. You're always up to mischief. And you always carry things too far and cause serious trouble."

"I'm high-spirited," Bill explained.

"But you're goin' to be low-spirited this year. We're more'n willin' to extend a little leeway durin' the rodeo season, but we can get along without riots and destruction of property."

BILL protested indignantly.

"I never did!"

"Last year, you got some of the boys riled up and they started a ruckus that ended in a reg'lar riot. It didn't please the storekeepers who got their windows smashed."

"Aw shucks! We chipped in and paid for the smashed windows, and got overcharged at that."

"Such things scare the womenfolks, and give Mesa Creek a bad name. I've issued a warnin' today, and I mean it. Got some special deputies to back me up. Any hombre who starts a ruckus gets tossed into jail, and there he'll stay until the rodeo is over—and I don't care a cuss if he's the star rider of some outfit."

"Yeah?" Laney lifted his eyebrows.

"I'm meanin' it. Don't make any mistake about that. Have your fun, but be careful how you have it. Plenty of room in the jail. The grub ain't very good, though, and you'll find it right confinin'. And you'll miss the rodeo dance."

The sheriff glared at Bill and disappeared in the crowd, and Laney walked on toward the largest store to get cigarette tobacco. He had lost his usual grin.

"Why, the old coot means it," he muttered. "He'd do it, too. Have to be mighty careful."

If he transgressed and got himself jailed, being ruled out of rodeo events wouldn't trouble anybody much. He was entered for only the calf roping, and wasn't very good at that. But he liked the thrill of riding in the opening parade. And he liked to dance, and had been looking forward to dancing at least once with a certain young lady.

He watched the passing crowd now. He was trying to locate his best friend, Jim Frand, the Triple X's rodeo star. Men of the outfit had bet their shirts on Jim Frand. Their idol's most dangerous opponent would be Cliff Newell, of the Star Dash ranch. Between the Triple X and Star Dash was a bitter enmity that had endured for years, and both outfits wanted to win rodeo events.

Dorothy Barland, daughter of the Triple X's owner, could win the girls' events without trouble. But the steer wrestling, wild horse riding and other important contests would probably be a tossup between Jim Frand and Cliff Newell of the Star Dash.

Bill gulped as he thought of Dorothy. He had been with the Triple X outfit for five years—he was twenty-nine now—and had been in love with Dorothy since the first day, when she had gone down to the corral and introduced herself and made him welcome as he was unsaddling.

But Laney did no love-making. He worshipped from afar. He was afraid he would be fired if he made advances, and he wanted at least to remain in her vicinity. And she was the owner's daughter and he was a bunkhouse cowpoke. He had heard that Henry Barland was democratic, but didn't think his democracy would extend to a marital union between ranchhouse and bunkhouse.

So Bill had shown his love by being of service to Dorothy whenever he could, running errands, catching up and saddling her pony—things like that—and had enjoyed her friendship.

Three years ago, Jim Frand had joined the bunkhouse crew. He was a handsome cowboy with twinkling eyes. He took a violent fancy to Dorothy, and he and Laney became pals. Bill took a great interest in the romance. If he couldn't have Dorothy, he would help his friend win her. Dorothy treated Frand cordially, but there was no world-shaking love affair. Things just drifted along.

Laney plowed through the rodeo crowd now, and finally located Jim in front of a store. They entered it together, and Bill got his tobacco and Jim a sack of hard candy.

"I'm hittin' for our camp at the rodeo grounds," Jim informed Laney.

"I'll get my pony and ride along."

They separated to get their horses.

Bill encountered Lewis Peyson, owner of the Star Dash. Peyson had the reputation of being a man who would do anything to make money or bring prestige to his ranch. He had bet heavily on the rodeo, backing his ranch's star, Cliff Newell.

"If it isn't the Triple X play boy!" Peyson greeted Laney. "What fun are you goin' to have this year—burn the town down?"

"Nope. I'm goin' to watch Jim Frand burn up the arena and race track and beat your Cliff Newell," Laney replied. "After that, all you Star Dash hombres will be burnin'—and busted."

CLIFF' NEWELL joined them at that instant.

"Cliff," Peyson said, "Bill Laney was just tellin' me that you're goin' to get licked."

Peyson laughed sarcastically. Newell's face grew dark.

"Some folks are always makin' loose talk," Newell remarked. He glared at Bill. "If there's some loose-talker yearnin' to be taken apart—"

"Are you maybe meanin' me?" Laney snapped, belligerently. As he spoke, he remembered Sheriff Richard's ultimatum. If he got into a fight, he would be tossed into jail and miss the opening parade and rodeo dance—and a chance to dance at least once with Dorothy.

Peyson was suddenly alarmed, too. He stepped between his star rider and Laney. "Take it easy!" Peyson warned. "Let it pass for the time bein', Cliff, and save it until after the show. I wouldn't put it past the Triple X gang to try to get you into a fight and hurt you so you can't ride."

"Why, you polecat!" Laney shouted at Peyson. "That's what us Triple X boys are thinkin' you might try to do to Jim Frand. But we're watchin', you bet!"

To the disgust of men who had crowded near at the sound of angry voices, there was no brawl. Peyson urged Newell through the crowd.

Laney went on to get his pony and join Jim Frand, and they started for the rodeo grounds half a mile away.

"How's things, Jim?" Bill asked.

"Nothin' new. I checked the entries, and there's been no last-minute registrations. Newell is the rider I'll have to beat. I heard he hasn't had to do any work for a month. Spent all the time practicin' rodeo stuff. If the Old Man had given me a chance like that—"

"Shucks! You got more practice doin' your reg'lar ranch work," Laney interrupted. "You want to watch everything and everybody and take care of yourself. I wouldn't put any dirty trick past Peyson and Newell. Are you goin' to ride with Dorothy in the openin' parade in the mornin'?"

"Nope. All the cowgirls are goin' to ride together."

"How are you gettin' along—with Dorothy, I mean?"

"I'm danged if I know, Bill. I don't seem to be makin' any headway. She treats me fine, but it's only friendly like. If I didn't know better, I'd say she has another man in her mind. But she never runs around with one. Here we are at camp. Your tent is next to mine."

At the Triple X camp, Laney rubbed down his pony and put him on the picket line, stacked his saddle, washed and went to his tent. His duffelbag had been brought on the supply wagon, and he unpacked it and was ready when the chuckwagon cook beat a dishpan with an iron spoon and called everybody to the evening meal.

Barland and Dorothy ate at the chuckwagon with the others. Dorothy was excited about the rodeo. Barland was to ride to town to visit other owners and discuss range affairs. Laney and Jim had planned to ride to town also, meet friends from other ranches and have some fun.

As they finished eating, Dorothy spoke.

"I want Jim and Bill to ride with me to the Box Bar camp. I'm going to spend the night

with Mollie Mooney. If you boys are riding into town, it won't be much out of your way."

"We'll ride along with you," Jim replied.

Bill looked at her. In the sunset she was beautiful as she stood before them, tall and slender, her face framed in a mass of brunette hair. She was wearing riding clothes, and moved with a lithe grace as she went to get her pony.

Laney sighed as he turned away with Frand. She was not for him! And Jim seemed to be a laggard in love. Bill decided he'd have to prod Jim into activity, get him to put some speed and decision into his love affair.

Dorothy rode between them to the Box Bar camp. "You boys behave yourselves in town," she ordered. "The ranch will need every point we can win to beat the Star Dash this year. Peyson is out to lick us. Don't get into a brawl and get hurt so you can't compete. Sheriff Richards has threatened to jail any man who doesn't behave."

"Yeah, he told me about it," Laney said, grinning.

"It isn't anything to laugh at, Bill," Dorothy warned. "The sheriff means what he says. The storekeepers raised a great row about what happened last year. If you get in jail, you'll stay there until the rodeo is over. No prize money for you, and no points for the ranch. Jim, Dad is spending a lot on you, so be careful. You watch over him, Bill."

"I'll do that," Laney promised.

He gulped again. It was an unpleasant job protecting another man because the girl you loved asked it, even when the other man was your best friend.

IN TOWN, they saw the sheriff watching them as they dismounted and tied their ponies. He shook a warning finger at them and hurried away.

"He's sure got his eye on me," Laney complained. "But what do we care, Jim? We ain't plannin' any devilment. Or are we?"

Frand grinned. "Under the circumstances, we ain't," he declared. "Durin' this rodeo, we're as innocent as sleepin' babies. For tonight and the next two days, we've got to behave ourselves no matter how painful. The Old Man and Dorothy will have fits if anything goes wrong. Let's drift down the street and see what's happenin'."

Bill agreed with the sentiments. He had decided to behave himself and not endanger the Triple X's chances of defeating the Star Dash. He had bet everything he had and even the next payday's wages on the Triple X, and naturally did not wish to do anything to jeopardize his investment.

The street was ablaze with lights, including flaring oil torches. Walks and stores were crowded, and the babble of voices was everywhere.

Laney plowed through the crowd with Frand at his side. They had no particular objective. Finally, they met a couple of riders from the Box Bar ranch, and the four entered the nearest saloon. It was the Ace High, and Lew Peyson had a half interest in the place.

"Sassyparilly for me," Frand said, when they reached the bar. "Nothin' stronger till the rodeo is over."

"Make mine the same," Laney said.

Not being rodeo entrants, the two Box Bar men drank something stronger. The bartender reached beneath the bar for the sarsaparilla bottle, a thing seldom used. And at that moment Lew Peyson appeared beside the group.

"Howdy, Frand!" he greeted Jim. "My man Newell is goin' after yore scalp, and naturally I'm bettin' agin yuh, but may the best man win!"

"Thanks," Frand replied.

"You and Bill Laney and your friends—your money ain't any good here. Whatever you want is on the house. As you know, I own half of this place."

"You're too good to be true," Laney told him.

Peyson managed a grin. "No hard feelin's, Bill. Drink up! After the rodeo's over, drop in and get some of the hard stuff—also on the house. I'll be seein' you later."

Peyson went through the crowd, and Laney and Jim turned to the bar to find their soft drinks in front of them. They downed them.

"I gotta get some tobacco," Frand said.

Bill and Jim excused themselves from the Box Bar men, waving aside another drink, and got out upon the street. Almost at once, Frand reeled against the front of a building.

"Bill, I'm goin' to be sick," he said.

"Your stummick ain't used to that soft stuff," Laney told him, grinning.

"I—I mean it. I'm bad sick. Help me

away from the street. My insides are comin' up."

There was a space between two buildings, and Laney led Jim through it and to the rear of the line of stores. There, with Bill holding him, Jim proceeded to be very sick for a spell.

"What you reckon?" Laney asked when Jim began to feel better. "Too much hard candy?"

Frand's voice was weak and shaky.

"Bill, once years ago I got doped in a gamblin' house down El Paso way. I never forgot the taste. This is the same thing."

"What?" Laney exclaimed.

"That drink was doped. That's Lew Peyson's place, ain't it? And he was right there ready to give the bartender a wink. On the house, huh? Glad I got sick quick and got rid of it before it got all through my system."

"Why, that—!" Bill began.

JIM'S mouth set grimly. "I'm gettin' square with him," he declared. "And when the rodeo is over I'll bust him in the nose. Come with me."

"Where you goin', Jim? You can't find Peyson and start a ruckus. His men will be hangin' around waitin' for that, and you might get hurt too bad to ride. And the sheriff'll toss you into jail. The old coot had his eye on us when we came out of the saloon."

"I've got to do somethin' about it," Frand declared. "Nobody can dope me and get away with it!"

"Maybe we'd better get the town sawbones to handle you," Laney suggested. "Then you hit for camp and get some grub and a good night's rest. Me, I'll deal with Peyson."

"My private affair," Frand muttered. Bill sensed that Jim scarcely knew what he was saying. He started away, a little wabbly. Bill followed, saw Jim stoop several times and saw he was picking up rocks.

"Hey, Jim—" he protested.

He was too late. Jim Frand was mad. The first rock he hurled smashed a window in the rear of the saloon where he had been served doped sarsaparilla. The second rock smashed another window. The third shattered a rear window in a store adjoining the saloon, an establishment in which Peyson also had an interest.

Yells came from inside both buildings. The rear door of the saloon was jerked open, and a white-aproned bartender appeared—the one who had given Jim the doped drink. Jim hurled another rock which struck the bartender on the shoulder and made him retreat.

Then, Laney had grabbed Jim and forced him into a dark spot where they could not be seen. "Listen, quick!" Bill whispered. "The sheriff'll be here. Hide behind those barrels and I'll take the blame for this. No argument. Get back to camp and doctor yourself. Remember the bets on you—and how Dorothy will feel and the Old Man act if you don't ride. If you get tossed into jail—"

"I—I was mad," Jim muttered.

"Do as I say, now. I wouldn't win many points for the ranch anyhow. Say nothin' to nobody! Keep your mouth shut. Get behind those barrels."

Frand obeyed, as Laney ran back into the moonlight and picked up a rock himself. More yells were heard as Sheriff Richards and a deputy came charging from the street. They saw Bill out in the moonlight in the act of throwing a rock.

"Hey, Bill Laney! I want you!" the sheriff yelled.

Laney turned to run. Sheriff and deputy pursued. At a safe distance from where Jim was hiding, Bill pretended to stumble and sprawl, and they grabbed him.

"I warned you," the sheriff thundered. "Into jail you go till the rodeo is over. Thought I was only funnin', did you? Why did you do it?"

"Peyson made me mad," Bill explained. "Him and his Star Dash outfit! Said Cliff Newell could beat Jim Frand. Where's Jim? I lost him somewhere. I'll go find him—"

"You'll go to jail," the sheriff broke in. "It'll be easier for him to find you."

The cot in the jail cell was uncomfortable, but Laney sprawled his length on it. Presently, he slept. The dawn found him shivering, and shortly thereafter Sheriff Richards appeared with breakfast—coffee that tasted like lye, ham and eggs almost burned, and a hunk of stale bread.

"I sent word to Barland that I'd had to jail you," the sheriff reported. "He'll prob'ly be riled about it. Maybe fire you."

"He'll be riled at you for puttin' a Triple X man in jail," Laney returned. "You've been on this job so long you think you own

the state. Here's where you start on your way out. Every cowpoke with a vote will be after your scalp come next election."

"I don't scare easy," the sheriff informed him.

"Folks will turn agin you," Laney continued. "They won't speak to you on the street. They'll hold their noses when you pass. I wouldn't be in your boots for nothin'."

"I'll manage to struggle along," the sheriff said. "I'll leave the outside window open so you can hear the band good when the rodeo parade passes."

LANEY heard the band. He visualized the parade, the cheering throng, men and girls of the range riding their ponies and waving at the crowd. He choked with emotion and stretched himself on the cot again.

After the parade, it grew quiet in the street and Bill knew almost everybody had gone to the rodeo grounds. Then Sheriff Richards came from the front office escorting Jim Frand, and left the friends alone.

"Bill, I can't stand this!" Frand said in low tones. "It's all my fault. I was so sick I didn't know what I was doin', and mad because I'd been doped. I can't stand it to have you take the blame for me. I'm goin' to tell folks—"

"Don't be a fool, Jim! Keep your mouth shut and get out to the grounds and win rodeo contests. That's your job. Beat Cliff Newell. That'll hurt Peyson more'n anything else."

"Peyson! If I told what happened—"

"Peyson would deny it, and the sheriff wouldn't believe you. The saloon was full of Star Dash men at the time. The bartender would swear our drinks came out of the same bottle, and point out that I didn't get sick. The dope was in the glass before he filled it, o' course. Get out to the grounds and ride for the Triple X and Dorothy, and leave the rest to me. Come and see me again as soon as you can."

Laney slept for a time and was awakened by the sheriff bringing him the midday meal. It was a good meal, and Bill ate like a famished man.

"Your friend, Jim, and Cliff Newell are neck and neck so far," the sheriff reported. "Both won in the preliminaries for steer wrestlin' and wild horse ridin'. Calf ropin' this afternoon. Don't you wish you could watch it? But you just had to be a bad boy, and after me warnin' you."

"Personal, I'm enjoyin' my stay in your jail," Bill replied. "First real rest I've had for ages. Jim'll come to see me this evenin', maybe, and tell me the score that far."

The sheriff looked out of the window.

"Accordin' to all appearances, they'll have a fine rodeo dance this evenin,'" he said. "Got better music than usual. More girls in town, too. It's tough you got to miss that, Bill."

"Tough for the girls," Bill told him. "Me, I've got a reputation for bein' a good dancer."

"Bill, you tell me the truth. Why did you smash them windows?"

"I'm high-spirited," Laney reminded him.

It was quiet again during the afternoon, with everybody in Mesa Creek out at the rodeo grounds. The sheriff appeared in the evening with another good meal, and Jim came while Laney was eating, and the sheriff left them alone as before.

"How's things?" Bill asked.

"They're goin' all right. I was shaky durin' the mornin' contests, but better this afternoon. That dope sure must have been powerful. Me and Newell both qualified for the finals in the calf ropin' and wild horse ridin'. He's the only man who's worryin' me."

"You'll beat him and wreck Peyson," Laney declared. "It's in the cards. A sky pilot told me once that a man's meanness always comes back to torment him. Peyson's got a lot due to come back to him."

"I hate to see you here like this—" Jim began.

"You forget that! You win this rodeo for the Triple X and Dorothy, and I'll be satisfied. What'd the Old Man say about me bein' a jailbird?"

"He roared that you was fired, but he'll change his mind. Dorothy said to tell you she'd drop in on the way to the dance."

"You dance with her once extra for me," said Bill, with a gulp.

Frand hurried away to return to the camp and rest some before the dance. He had explained to Bill that some of the Triple X men were guarding him continuously, to see that Peyson worked none of his tricks.

Laney slept again for a time, and the sound of voices brought him awake. He got off the cot and went to the cell door. The

sheriff had turned out the light in the cell room, but one was burning in the office. Through the half-opened door, Bill saw Dorothy and her father.

THE sheriff lit the lamp in the back room and ushered his visitors in and left them alone with Laney. Dorothy and Barland stood close to the bars.

"Bill, Jim told us everything," Barland said. "I was goin' to fire you for disgracin' the outfit, but you're a hero to me now. It was a fine thing to do, Bill. If the sheriff had caught Jim, he'd have jailed him and Jim would have been out of the rodeo. Even if he'd found out the truth afterward, he wouldn't have dared release Jim. Peyson and his men would have howled that the dopin' was all a lie and that the sheriff was takin' sides."

"Yeah, that's right," Laney admitted.

"You did the right thing, Bill—a splendid thing. We'll see that everybody learns the truth after tomorrow. And Jim did the right thing—came to me and told me all, and wanted to take your place here."

"Just let things slide," Bill begged. "Jim's got to lick Cliff Newell and Peyson."

"You see, Bill, the sheriff believes the story, but he hasn't a mite of evidence, and can't go around accusin' Peyson and his men without it. I'll make it up to you, Bill—for bein' a jailbird a couple of days, I mean."

Barland strolled toward the front room, and Dorothy took his place at the barred door.

"It was a splendid thing you did, Bill," she whispered. "It was for your friend and the ranch—and maybe a little for me? It's made me like you more than—than I did before. Like you a terrible lot—" Her face was flaming.

"You—you mean you like me a heap?" Laney gulped. "But what about Jim?"

"He's a good man to have for a friend, Bill. You've been terribly blind, you know. Maybe you need somebody to lead you through life. Here—" She handed him something through the bars. Laney held two keys.

"I got these in the front room, Bill. One unlocks your cell and the other the front door. The sheriff has an extra set of keys hanging on the wall."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just use your judgment, Bill. As we came here, we passed the saloon where Jim got the doped drink. He glanced in and told me that the bartender who doped him is working tonight. For a short time this evening, at least, almost everybody will be at the dance, either dancing or watching."

She dimpled at him and hurried away before Laney, half stunned by her personal revelation and the miracle of the keys, could speak again. She closed the office door as she went out.

The sheriff had left the lamp burning. Bill stretched on the couch again to think. Voices and laughter came from the street. After a time, he heard distant music, and knew the dance had started. The jail door would be locked, and the sheriff and his deputies would be at the dance hall to keep the peace.

Laney waited for a considerable time, then used the key to unlock the cell. He inspected the other two cells, left their doors open, and went to the office door. No sound of voices came to his ears.

Cautiously, he opened the door and peered into the empty office. The jail was near the end of the street where there were not many passersby. Bill got out, leaving the doors unlocked behind him—but not before he had helped himself to one of the sheriff's six-guns and a well-stuffed cartridge belt.

Getting behind the jail, Laney hurried almost silently through the darkness, keeping behind the row of buildings. He reached the saloon, crouched behind it, raised himself and peered in.

The guilty bartender was there, wiping glasses. Three town loafers were playing cards at a table in a front corner. The bartender came from behind the bar with a large pail of dirty water, and started for the back door. Bill realized he was coming out to empty the pail. That made it easier.

He had the six-gun ready as the bartender emerged. He stepped to one side, out of the streak of light, and tossed the contents of the pail far out on the thirsty ground. As he started back, he found a belligerent Bill Laney standing in his path menacing him with a weapon.

"Don't you make a sound!" Bill warned.

"Wh—what? How'd you get out of jail? What you want? You fixin' to hold up the saloon?"

LANEY smiled coldly.

"I'm fixin' to deal with the hombre who

doped Jim Frand's sassyparilly and almost made him too sick to ride in the rodeo. And don't start lyin'! Take off that white apron and toss it on the ground."

"What you aimin' to do?"

"What you think should be done to a hombre like you—dopin' a man so he'd lose rodeo contests. Had a big bet down on Cliff Newell, did you?"

"I—I had to do it. Peyson made me. Said he'd give me a hundred if I did it and have me beat up and run out of town if I didn't. He fixed it to have Frand decoyed into the saloon."

"Right interestin'," Laney said. "March!"

The bartender had removed the apron, which might have been seen from a distance. Prodding him in the back with the muzzle of the gun, Bill marched his captive through the darkness behind the buildings.

"Where are you takin' me? What you goin' to do?" the bartender kept repeating.

"If I've got it right, Peyson never bribed you to dope Jim if he came into the saloon," Bill said. "You had a bet down, you skunk!"

"I tell you Peyson made me do it."

"Shut up and turn a little to the left!"

When they reached the jail, Laney made sure nobody was in the vicinity, and got his captive inside. He almost hurled him into one of the cells, which he locked securely.

"What right you got to do this?" the bartender demanded.

"Maybe the truth was found out, and maybe the sheriff made me a deputy," Bill replied. "You'll perhaps get a double dose of trouble, tryin' to put the blame on a big owner like Lewis Peyson—a fine man like him."

It had the effect Laney desired.

"Fine man, is he?" the bartender raged. "I knew all about him before I came to town two months ago and got a job in the saloon. He's as crooked as they come. I tell you he ordered me to dope Jim Frand if I got a chance to serve him a drink."

"Shut up and get some rest," Bill ordered.

He got out of the jail safely again, and went as rapidly as possible back to the saloon. The back door was still open, and a couple of men were going back into the saloon. Laney got in a dark spot and crouched on the ground. Two more men were still outside, and one of them was Peyson.

"I sure can't understand it," Peyson was saying. "We found his apron here on the ground. If he sneaked away to look in at the dance, leavin' the saloon alone, I'll have him skinned alive."

The other man went into the saloon and Peyson remained outside, walking around and examining the ground as if looking for tracks. But the brisk breeze had shifted the sandy fine earth and smeared tracks or obliterated them.

PEYSON turned to go into the building, and found an irate, gun-toting Bill Laney suddenly in front of him. Bill merely repeated his experience with the bartender.

"One yip outen you, Peyson, and I'll fill you with lead!" Bill warned. "Don't worry about your bartender. He's safe, and he's been talkin'."

"You, Laney! Out of jail! And what's all this? I'll have you run out of the country—"

"Easy, or I blast you!" Bill warned. "Step along where I say. Yell for help and it'll be your last yell. I'll teach you not to be crooked and dope a friend of mine! That's the way you and your Star Dash outfit plays, is it? It didn't work this time."

"What's this about dope?" Peyson asked, as Bill prodded him along.

"Oh, your bartender talked! Told me as how you ordered him to dope Jim."

"He's a liar! If there was any dopin' done, he did it himself."

"Right interestin'. March!"

The journey to the jail was repeated, though Peyson made more and stronger threats than had the bartender. Bill got him into the jail without being seen and locked him in the cell next to the bartender's. Peyson was raging.

"You kidnapped me at the point of a gun—and you're a man with no authority. I'll send you to state's prison for it, Bill Laney!"

"Maybe we'll have adjoinin' cells," Laney suggested.

"And you!" Peyson raged at the incarcerated bartender. "Sayin' I ordered you to dope Frand!"

"You did," the bartender stormed back. "And you ain't goin' to put the blame on me 'cause it misfired."

"I'll run you out of this part of the country."

"That's all right with me. I ain't been here but a few weeks, and I don't like Mesa Creek."

"If any dopin' was done, you did it, and without my orders. Who'll believe you agin me?"

"You've bet mighty heavy on your man Newell," the bartender hinted.

"I always bet on my men. Bet—that's it! You've got a bet down on Newell and thought you'd ruin Jim Frand's chances. How far do you expect to get—your word against mine?"

"Yeah, that's right," Bill chimed in. "It's a tossup. Your word agin his."

The bartender slammed his body angrily against the bars. "Ask the other two bartenders. The reg'lar one might not talk, but the one they brought from the county seat to work just for the rodeo will, if he's scared. Peyson told them both the same as me—to dope Frand if he happened to come in. In three places under the bar right now you'll find bottles of dope. Ask the other barmen, and get that dope and find out who put it there and why!"

There was a sudden commotion, and the office door was pulled open and in strode Sheriff Tom Richards, two of his special deputies, Jim Frand and Henry Barland.

"That'll do!" the sheriff snapped. "We heard everything. Thought maybe Bill could get the evidence if he had a chance. Miss Barland gave you them keys at my order, Bill. You've been trailed and watched and listened to since then. Some of us were in the office listenin', and some outside that window, after you brought in Peyson. You're loose, Laney. Get outen my jail!"

"Are you insane, Richards?" Peyson howled at the sheriff.

"Don't think so. Been accused of it often. Make yourselves at home, gents. I'll see the judge about this in the mornin', and the rest is his job. But it's mine to jail and hold men when there's evidence. Can't do anything else."

LANEY found himself with Barland and Frand.

"You'll have time for a couple of dances with Dorothy," Frand said.

"He'll prob'ly have more than that durin' his lifetime," Barland added, chuckling. "From what she's told me, Bill, we'll have to train you to be ranch foreman in time." Barland turned aside to greet a friend.

"I popped the question to Dorothy, Bill," Jim told him, "and a lot of good it did me. She's been in love with you right along. I reckon you love her more'n I do, and you'll make her a better husband. Me, I'm the wanderin' type."

So Laney danced with Dorothy three times, and went back to the camp with her. Barland had sent a man out to get Bill's pony, and he rode beside the buckboard in which Dorothy was riding with her father.

And the following day he sat beside Dorothy and watched Jim Frand decisively defeat Cliff Newell of the Star Dash and win glory for the Triple X. The story had been spread, and Laney found himself something of a hero, while Peyson, released on bail, found himself avoided by everybody.

Bill and Dorothy rode back to the ranch together on their ponies, and the outfit trailed behind, led by Barland in the buckboard.

"You acted just right handling Peyson and that bartender, Bill," Dorothy said. "The sheriff thought you were mad enough to do something like that, and get him evidence."

"Yeah," Laney replied, grinning at her. "I'm high-spirited."

Read Our Companion Western Magazines

TRIPLE WESTERN
THRILLING RANCH STORIES
POPULAR WESTERN
WEST
RANGE RIDERS WESTERN

THRILLING WESTERN
MASKED RIDER WESTERN
TEXAS RANGERS
EXCITING WESTERN
THE RIO KID WESTERN

NOW ON SALE AT ALL STANDS

IN THE ARENA

(Continued from page 8)

Pettigrew; 3rd, Carl Dossey; 4th, Lee Roberts. Third Go-round—1st, Tater Decker; 2nd, Bill McGuire; 3rd, George Mills; 4th, Bud Linderman. Finals—1st, Carl Dossey; 2nd, Homer Pettigrew; 3rd, Hank Mills; 4th, George Mills.

In Saddle Bronc Riding: First Go-round—1st, Bill Linderman; 2nd, Buster Ivory; 3rd, Tom Knight; 4th, Bud Linderman. Second Go-round—1st, Buster Ivory; 2nd, Bill Ward; 3rd, Pee Wee Morris; 4th, Vic Schwarz. Third Go-round—1st, Buster Ivory; 2nd, Tom Knight; 3rd, Bill Ward; 4th, split between Jerry Ambler and Casey Tibbs. Finals—1st, Buster Ivory; 2nd, Tom Knight; 3rd, Bill Ward; 4th, Vic Schwarz.

In Brahma Bull Riding: First Go-round—1st, Pee Wee Morris; 2nd, Jack Holder; 3rd, John Winters; 4th, Chuck Moser. Second Go-round—1st, Carl Cornett; 2nd, Wag Blessing; 3rd, Jim White; 4th, Pee Wee Morris. Finals—1st, Pee Wee Morris; 2nd, Wag Blessing; 3rd, Jack Holder; 4th, Carl Cornett.

In Bareback Bronc Riding: First Go-round—1st, Bud Linderman; 2nd, Sonny Tureman; 3rd, Bud Spealman; 4th, Casey Tibbs; 5th and 6th, split between Buster Ivory and Tater Decker. Second Go-round—1st and 2nd, split between Bud Spealman and Larry Finley; 3rd, Wag Blessing; 4th, Johnny Cobb; 5th, Cecil Henley.

Latest Standings

The standing of the contestants in the Rodeo Cowboys' Association point award system for the championship titles of this season at the last report was as follows: Bareback Bronc Riding: Bill Linderman, 2,882 points; Sonny Tureman, 2,648 points; Red Walker, 2,024 points; Bud Spealman, 2,000 points; Larry Finley, 1,974 points.

Carl Olson is leading the saddle bronc riders with 2,712 points; next in line are Bill McMackin, 2,425 points; Buster Ivory, 2,150 points; Jerry Ambler, 2,094 points; Bill Linderman, 1,881 points.

In Steer Wrestling, Homer Pettigrew is out in front with 3,384 points, followed by Buck Sorrells, 2,953 points; Jack Favor, 2,778 points; Dick Truitt, 2,145 points, and Todd Whatley, 2,090 points.

Wag Blessing is leading the bull riders with

[*Turn page*]

NOW! Amazing New Comfort for Tender Gums and loose False Teeth

TRY MY COMFORTING PLASTIC "CUSHION"

SO WONDERFUL that it is SENT to YOU

ON APPROVAL!

TRY 7 DAYS *FREE* -BE DELIGHTED

or DON'T PAY- not a penny in advance!

Why Such Remarkable Relief?
My plate liner corrects loose or uneven fit by molding itself to every mouth crevice that should fit to your plates: Saliva toughens lining to firm "cushion" fit.

How Is It Different?
Its secret formula makes possible both durability and "cushion" effect. Users write us they have never found anything like it—a comforting, easy to use product that lasts from 3 months to a year—average cost less than 1 and 1/2c a day.

Why This Offer to New Users?
Results must seem almost like magic, or I couldn't promise you satisfaction before paying. Find out at my risk how you can get comfort—also save money. *Nothing like it in drug stores—Order direct ($2 tube) DR. DAY'S, Dept. 3, 437 So. Hill St., Los Angeles 13, Calif.*

JUST SPREAD ON AT NIGHT—Wake Up with a New, Snug Fit
for UPPERS or LOWERS

Simple directions tell you all you need to know

THINK OF IT!
No more bother and expense of powders, pastes, or pads. A de-luxe, resilient plastic—easy to use. **No heating!** *Self-hardening. So durable it will not come off in cleaners, yet harmless to plates, because it can be removed. Tasteless! Odorless!*

Rush Coupon NOW!
7 day FREE trial

Dr. Day's DENTAL PLATE LINER

Dept. 3, 437 S. Hill St. Los Angeles 13, Calif.
I want to try your plate liner on approval. If I am pleased, I will mail you $2.00 in cash, money order, or check within 7 days. If I am not pleased, I am free to pay nothing, and will return remainder of tube instead of paying.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

TOWN_____ STATE_____

(Please Print Name and Address)

FREE ENLARGEMENT
of your Favorite Photo
FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 5 x 7 enlargement of any picture or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Limit 2 to a customer. Please enclose 10c to cover cost of handling and mailing each enlargement. Your original picture or negative will be returned with the FREE 5 x 7 enlargement postpaid. Act now! Offer limited to U. S. A.
HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 346, Hollywood, Calif.

HORSE MASTERY!
A FINE HOBBY — A GREAT VOCATION!
"The EXPERT HORSEMAN"
SUBSCRIBE TODAY 50¢ One Year

FREE BOOK — Tells how You can learn to: BREAK COLTS, GAIT SHOW HORSES, TRAIN RODEO, STOCK and RACE HORSES, BREAK BAD HABITS, HANDLE ANY HORSE. TRAIN CIRCUS TRICK HORSES. WRITE TODAY!
ANIMAL LOVERS ASSOCIATION
BOX TH-157 TARZANA, CALIFORNIA

LAW STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. G.I. Approved. Send for FREE BOOK.
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 81T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

COMB-A-TRIM The New Quick Trimmer
Something New! Trim your hair without any experience. It's easy! The excess hair comes off smoothly and easily by just pulling trimmer through hair like an ordinary comb. Save on hair-cut bills. . . . Trim your own hair or the whole family's. Send 59c and your Comb-A-Trim will be sent at once, postpaid. **59¢**
SPECIAL OFFER Send $1.00 for 2 Comb-A-Trims. Save 18c **2 for 1** 5 Extra Blades (Year's Supply) **25¢**
COMB-A-TRIM CO., CAREW TOWER, Dept. L-50, Cincinnati, Ohio

Sterling Silver **Saddle RING**

Authentic replica of championship rodeo saddle! Handsomely formed from solid Sterling Silver, by expert silver craftsmen. Men's, Women's, Children's styles.
SEND NO MONEY! Just clip ad and mail with name, address, ring style and size. Pay postman only $4.95 (includes tax) plus postage, wear 5 days. If not delighted, return for full refund.
Arizona Craftsmen Dpt. 606H 1904 Farnam Omaha 2, Nebr.

STOMACH ULCERS
Why suffer needlessly? You can get fast relief, know the joys of good health again quickly . . . with inexpensive, pleasant tasting Medicine Rock Mineral Water. This is nature's own remedy, discovered in the mountains of Southern Oregon.
What it has done for others it can do for you! $3.00 bottle. (Money back guarantee . . . Folder on request.) Medicine Rock Mineral Water Company, Dept. N, Shady Cove, Ore.
Get relief with
MEDICINE ROCK MINERAL WATER

3,074 points, followed by Jake Monroe, 2,251 points; Ken Roberts, 1,602 points; Dale Adams, 1,595 points; and Roy Calloway, 1,484 points.

In Calf Roping Troy Fort is leading the field with 9,110 points. Toots Mansfield is second with 5,414 points. Others among the five leaders are Zeano Ferris, 4,556 points; N.A. Pittcock, 3,189 points, and Buck Sorrells, 2,744 points.

Asbury Schell is leading the Team Ropers with 1,059 points, followed by Buck Sorrells, 961 points; Fred Darnell, 940 points; Cliff Whatley, 804 points, and Jim Brister, 703 points.

In Steer Roping, the leader is Buddy Neal, 1,857 points, followed by Toots Mansfield, 1,810 points; Tommie Rhodes, 1,370 points; J. D. Holleyman, 785 points, and John Rhodes, 750 points.

The Remount Service

It appears that the United States Government is about to liquidate the American Remount Service. It was suggested and assumed that the United States Department of Agriculture would take the Remount Service over and operate it as a part of their department, but the United States Department of Agriculture is not in a position to do this and so there arises a grave possibility that the Remount Service will be entirely done away with.

The Remount Service has been instrumental in promoting and fostering better horses throughout the United States. We owe much to this branch of the War Department for the intense interest that has flooded our country during the past few years, affording us the finest stock of all types and breeds of horses in the world. Great sums of money have been spent on developing, selecting, and maintaining purebred horses.

It is pointed out by horse enthusiasts that in order to keep abreast of the times in the horse world this all-important work must be continued, and they are making appeals to all horse lovers to throw their influence into the proposition and make an appeal for some concrete action to prevent the abandonment of the service.

An Arizona Rodeo

The Douglas, Arizona, Rodeo, was a swell show. Harry Knight was the arena director, and John Jordan the announcer. Vern and

Myrtle Goodrich, Jeanne Godshall and Buck Abbott, were among the contract performers in fancy roping and trick riding. Fred Sharpe, Jr., was the secretary.

There were no finals in the bull riding but the winners by go-rounds were: First Go-round—1st, Clinton Hill; 2nd, Webb Brenton; 3rd, Bill Weeks; 4th, Joel Sublett. Second Go-round—1st, Logue Morris; 2nd, Pecos Whatley; 3rd, Clinton Hill; 4th, Bill Weeks. Third Go-round—1st, Phil Moniger; 2nd, Joel Sublett; 3rd, Buck Oliver; 4th, Clinton Hill.

Barney Willis won the finals in the steer wrestling, Chuck Sheppard was second, Frank Finley was third and Claude Morris was fourth. Doug Poage copped the finals of the calf roping, Cliff Whatley was second, Tommy Clayton was third and Pete Pasco was fourth.

Richard Hale and Avel De La Osa won the team roping, Buck Sorrells and Berry Gardner were second, Fred Darnell and Clarence Darnell were third and John Rhodes and Buck Sorrells were fourth.

There were no finals in the saddle bronc riding, but in the first go-round Frank Finley was the winner, Chet McCarty was second and Clinton Hill third. In the second go-round, Chet McCarty was the winner, Claude Morris was second and Chuck Sheppard was third, while in the third go-round Claude Morris and Chuck Sheppard tied and split first and second, with Bill Weeks taking third place.

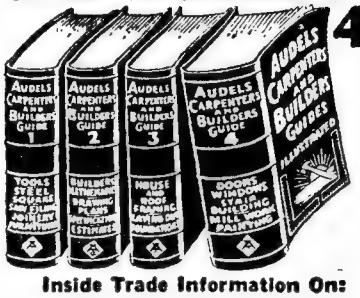
A New Idea

Something new in a rodeo grounds and sports field is being constructed on the Plainville-New Britain highway in Connecticut. Joseph E. Tinty, local merchant and sportsman of Plainville, is converting a 65-acre farm into a landing strip for civilian aviators and an arena for horse shows and rodeos. The landing strip is 200 feet wide and 1700 feet long, and has a parking place for 150 planes. The idea has been approved by the State Department of Aeronautics and is being built according to the specifications laid down by the department inspectors.

To one side of the landing strip is the arena where the rodeos and horse shows will be held during the season, and this will afford some of the cowboys who own their own planes the opportunity to fly in, park

[*Turn page*]

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides



4 vols. $6

Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Mechanics and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you want—including new methods, ideas, solutions, plans, systems and money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are using these Guides as a Helping Hand to Easier Work, Better Work and Better Pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail the FREE COUPON below.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving mensuration problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, bungalows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build hoists and scaffolds—skylights—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lath—lay floors—How to paint

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 49 W. 23rd St., New York City

Mail Audels Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' free trial. If O.K. I will remit $1 in 7 days, and $1 monthly until $6 is paid. Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

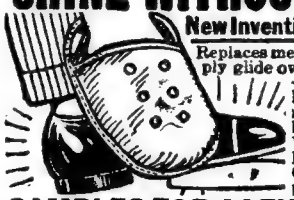
Reference..... PAL

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write to GEO. R. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

SHINE WITHOUT 'POLISH'

New Invention! • Sells Like Wild



Replaces messy pastes, liquids. Simply glide over shoes—and PRESTO!—you have a lustrous, long-lasting shine. No mess. No muss. No soiled hands. Clean. Handy. WORKS LIKE MAGIC! For Men's, Women's and Children's Shoes. Low priced. Lightning seller!

SAMPLES FOR AGENTS Sample offer sent immediately to all who send name at once. A penny postal will do. SEND NO MONEY—just your name. KRISTEE CO., 1477 Bar Street, AKRON, OHIO

WANT A

GOVERNMENT JOB

START $1,756 TO $3,021 YEAR

Veterans Get Preference. Many 1948 examinations expected. Prepare NOW! Mail coupon today, SURE.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. L94, ROCHESTER 4, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush without charge, (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs. (2) Tell me how to get one of these jobs.

Name.....

Address..... Yes?

Be an ARTIST!

—Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The fascinating field of Art offers commercial opportunities to men and women. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING, DESIGNING all in one complete course. We prepare you step-by-step. Trained Artists are capable of earning $50, $60, $75 a week. Colorful FREE BOOK, "Art for Pleasure and Profit—" describes course and method of instruction. TWO ART OUTFITS included with training. STATE AGE. Course approved under G. I. Bill.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART, Studio 6610 H
1115—15th St., N. W. WASHINGTON 5, D. C.

FREE BOOK gives details

RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS-NEURITIS-SCIATICA

If you suffer, the agonizing pains of these diseases when the usual remedies have failed, learn about a new trustworthy, modern, non-surgical treatment method. This marvelous treatment is completely explained in the Ball Clinic's FREE Book. Write today. No obligation.

BALL CLINIC Dept. 504, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

LOCKSMITHING and Key Making! Complete Up-to-date COURSE . . . How to pick locks, decode, make master-keys, repair, install, service, etc. 53 easy illustrated SELF-INSTRUCTION LESSONS for every handy man, home-owner, carpenter, mechanic, etc. Satisfaction guaranteed. Send for Success-catalog FREE.
NELSON CO., 1139 S. Wabash, Dept. 06, Chicago 5

PICTURE RING $1.

Exquisite Picture Ring—made from any photo. **SEND NO MONEY!** Mail photo with paper strip for ring size. Pay postman only $1 plus postage. Hand tinted 25c extra. Photo returned with ring. Money back guarantee.
PICTURE RING CO. SEND PHOTO AND RING SIZE NOW! Dept. R-26, CINCINNATI 2, Ohio

Made from Any Photo or Picture! SEND NO MONEY!

LAW STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 39 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. G.I. Approved. Send for FREE BOOK.
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 81T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

GUM GRIPPER Tightens FALSE TEETH or NO COST

Lasts from 3 to 6 Months!
New discovery makes loose dental plates fit snug and comfortable for months—almost like having your own teeth again. For uppers and lowers.

Easy to Apply at Home... Simply squeeze some "GUM GRIPPER" evenly on your denture, put plate in your mouth where it sets and hardens in few minutes. No heat—no fuss—no muss. Will not harm any denture.

SEND NO MONEY...

Order a tube today, for only $1.00 (deposit with your own postman). Each application of "GUM GRIPPER" guaranteed to last from 3 to 6 months and delight you completely or your money will be cheerfully refunded.

GUM GRIPPER, INC.
127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 50, Chicago 12, Ill.

their planes, compete in an event and then fly on to the next rodeo.

Championship Show at Phoenix

Phoenix, Arizona, really went Western with its Championship Rodeo sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, with a regular Western Kangaroo Court on the downtown streets. There were many visitors from the movie colony of Hollywood, including Bob Hope, Lucile Ball, Jerry Colonna, and many others. There was an opening day parade of some three miles in length, which was witnessed by nearly a hundred thousand citizens and visitors.

The West, pioneer and modern, held completely sway in the vivid procession. There were about 40 floats and old-time vehicles, thousands of gaily-garbed cowboys and cowgirls riding everything from sleek Palominos to lop-eared burros, and 17 bands and orchestras to fill the day with martial and western music.

Promptly on time in the brilliant 80 degree sunshine, the parade, which took an hour in passing, swung down Central Avenue. Led by the colors and the Hardin-Simmons University Cowboy Band, of Abilene, Texas, the line circled through the city.

Just behind the lead band rode Roy Wayland, grand parade marshal; "Dusty" Killian, Rodeo Queen, on her beautiful prancing Palomino, and her attendants Nancy Pratt and Kay Gullard. In the parade was the old Apache Trail Stagecoach, an old tasseled hearse which dated back to 1907, and a float depicting Fraser's painting. "The end of the Trail." An orchestra on another float depicted cowboys around a campfire at night and there were so many interesting vehicles, floats and individual costumes that it was amazing.

Eight thousand attended the first performance of the rodeo and watched the tough stock that Everett Colborn had assembled for the occasion get the better of most of the cowhands. For example, in the saddle bronc riding, out of eleven riders, five were thrown. Eight out of twelve teams in the team roping received no time, and only two riders were able to qualify in the Brahma bull riding.

Buck Sorrells won the calf roping, Toots Mansfield and Walton Poage won the team roping, Bill McMackin won the steer wrestling, Larry Finley won the bareback bronc

riding, Carl Olson won the saddle bronc riding and Jack Spurling won the bull riding.

Well, waddies, I guess that is about all from the Arena this trip so I'll be saying *Adios.*

—FOGHORN CLANCY.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

TENSE emotional conflict and the stark drama of the Arena gallop through the pages of MOUNTAIN RIDER, the smashing novelet by L. P. Holmes featured in the next issue of RODEO ROMANCES.

The men of his outfit found Lee Shelly apparently drunk, though actually he had been knocked out by a glass of doped liquor. But no one believed Lee's story, and he was due to make his final ride in the Rodeo at once. Only Lee's pard, Johnny Dykes sided with him, and even Johnny had his doubts.

Even though he was sick and weak Lee insisted on riding "Yellow Fever." Lee climbed dizzily over the side of the chute, let himself down into the saddle. Yellow Fever, a deceptive, murderous chunk of equine dynamite under a buckskin hide, accepted his weight without a quiver.

"Watch the chutes, ladies and gentlemen," the announcer blared. "Lee Shelly coming out on Yellow Fever. Watch the chutes!"

An anticipatory roar began in the stands. Lee had a lot of supporters over there who did not know.

"Cut him loose!" Lee said through set teeth.

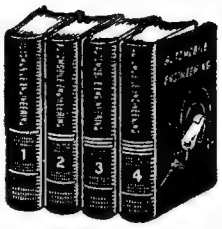
The chute gate banged open and Lee Shelly knew he wasn't going to ride this one. There was no strength in his legs to grip and shift. There was no balance in his sick head, no orientation in his eyes. Sheer riding instinct kept him up there for a few jumps. Then Yellow Fever began to weave and that was that. Lee lost a stirrup and the horse went cleanly out from under him.

The belting shock of the earth coming up at him bludgeoned his head into fresh agony and there was the confused whirl of riderless horse and empty, flapping stirrups going down the arena and then the pick-up men cutting in.

By sheer, stalk will, Lee Shelly pulled himself up out of the hoof churned dust and lurched back to the chutes.

"Something tells me you're through in this neck of the woods," Bill Brancifort, the

[*Turn page*]



AUTO BOOKS ON APPROVAL

SEND NO MONEY. Just mail the coupon for a complete set of 4 Big, Thick Auto Books, 20th Edition, 2800 Pages! Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, take immediate advantage of this FREE EXAMINATION OFFER.

MAKE GOOD MONEY NOW HOLD A PERMANENT JOB

America wants its automobiles kept in good repair. Men with "know how" are in demand, at big pay. These books will help you get and hold an important job, or give you a chance to go into business for yourself now or later. Any man who half tries to improve himself can learn auto servicing and repairing by this quick reference method. Use the JIFFY INDEX to find easily understood answer to any auto problem. These wonder books prepared by eleven of America's great automobile engineers. Many hundreds of valuable illustrations. Send the coupon TODAY.

CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to make difficult repairs and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

4 BIG, THICK VOLUMES

2800 pages, 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc., including Diesel engines. Beautiful modernistic, washable cloth binding.

A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given with these books without extra charge.

Vocational Publishers Since 1898

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. A749
Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.
I would like to examine your 4-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I may return them express collect. If after 10 days' use I prefer to keep them, I will send you $2 and pay the balance at the rate of only $3 a month until $24.80 has been paid. Include consulting service as offered above.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.

STAMMER?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering — successful for 46 years. *Free — no obligation.*

GET THIS FREE BOOK!

Benjamin N. Bogue, Dept. 4283, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

Learn BAKING At Home

Baking is one of America's high industries in wages. Nearly depression-proof. Thorough basic home course lays sound foundation. If you have aptitude, write for FREE BOOKLET, "Opportunities in Commercial Baking."
National Baking School, 1315 Mich. Ave., Dept. 1807, Chicago 5

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

YOU CAN influence others with your thinking! Learn to impress others favorably—*get across your ideas.* Let the Rosicrucians show you how to use the power of mind. For *free book* write Scribe F.X.Y.

The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California

BE A *Nurse*

MAKE $30-$40 A WEEK

Practical nurses are needed in every community . . . doctors rely on them . . . patients appreciate their cheerful, expert care. You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. 48th yr. Earn while learning. High School not required. Men, women, 18 to 60. Trial plan. Write now!

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 429, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name .....

City ..... State ..... Age .....

It's new! It's handy! It's efficient! Use the Midget Electric Arc Welder for hundreds of light-metal jobs. Does comparable weldisg work with a 1/16 inch welding rod on thin metal as that of larger and higher priced welders. Operates on 15 ampere fuse, 110 volt 60 cycle A.C. or D.C. current, by use of our special standard-coated 1/16-inch welding rods. Generous supply of rods supplied with machine. Recommended for all light welding like automobile fenders, etc. Take the Midget Arc anywhere to the job. Sturdily built and fully guaranteed. Comes complete—ready to use. Nothnig else to buy. No previous welding experience needed to strike an arc. In a short time, anyone mechanically inclined can learn to weld with this machine. You'll find hundreds of money-saving, time-saving uses for the Midget Arc around your home, garage, or workshop. Also in garages, factories, repair shops, tin shops, mechanics, farmers, inventors, etc. Order a Midget Electric Arc Welder now! SEND NO MONEY. We'll rush one to you, complete with rods and helmet (equipped with APPROVED welding glass). Pay postman only $3.95 plus postage charges. If not satisfied, return Midget Arc in 5 days from receipt and we'll refund your money immediately. RUSH YOUR ORDER NOW.

MIDGET ARC WELDER CO., Strader Ave., Dept. C-233, Cincinnati 26, Ohio

Dangers Of Delay On Chronic Ailments

FREE BOOK—Tells How To Help Guard Health

Many facts about colon disorders, headaches, constipation, nervousness or stomach, liver and bladder conditions are explained in a new 40-page FREE BOOK. Write today. Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite 1056, 926 McGee Street, Kansas City, Mo.

Made to U.S. Army Specifications!

15-JEWEL

ELGIN

$18.95

Sturdy 15-Jewel ELGIN men's wrist watches. Waterproofed. Sweep second hand. Stainless Steel back. Unbreakable crystal. QUALITY! American made. Fully reconditioned with ONE YEAR GUARANTEE! Made for the U. S. Army Air Corps. They HAD to be good. SEND NO MONEY. Simply pay postmn $18.95 plus 10% tax and postage on delivery. Cash orders sent postpaid. Limited supply. UNITED PRODUCTS CO., 7941 S. Halsted St., Dept. WES-132, Chicago 20, Ill.

chute boss, told him with a sneer. "When you let down yore friends like you let 'em down today, you're done!"

The chute boss was right. All around him Lee found nothing but bitterness. Orin Decker, owner of the big Tumbling D outfit for which Lee had worked, fired him. Lee hoped that Kate Decker, the ranch owner's daughter would retain her faith in him, but he found she was devoting all her attention to Puff Owen, who had won the bronc twisting crown.

Lee decided to leave that part of the country. He asked Johnny Dykes to ride out to the ranch and get his war bag, and leave it at the livery stable in town.

"What you aiming to do?" Johnny asked.

"Clear out of this blasted neck of the woods," Lee said. "You go fetch my war bag, Johnny—like a good feller."

Johnny sighed, shrugged, headed out.

That night Lee was in the harness room of the stable talking to Johnny Dykes and Scotty McCloud.

"All right," said Johnny. "We'll take yore word for it. You weren't drunk—you were doped. But who did it and what for?"

Lee told them that he had been in the Five Star Saloon the previous night. "Jake Dearborn was there, talking to Fred Clinch," Lee said. "Dearborn insisted on buying a drink for me. He gave me a lot of sauce about what good rides I'd been puiting on and said, Yellow Fever or no Yellow Fever, his money was on me to win the finals.

"Well, Clinch brought us our drinks, I tossed mine off and started for the hotel. I got just about to the middle of the street when it hit me. All of a sudden the street started pitching up and down, my eyes went queer and my feet wouldn't track."

Scotty McCloud suggested that since everybody had been betting on Lee to win the Rodeo championship again, as he had won it in other years Dearborn, had probably bet against him—and then fixed it so Lee couldn't win. Johnny and Lee agreed with Scotty.

Later Lee and Scotty went to the Five Star, where Lee collected his pay check from his former boss and found Orin Decker still scornful. Lee loudly claimed that his drink had been drugged and then faced Dearborn, the gambler, and Fred Clinch, the bartender.

Lee stared across the bar at Fred Clinch. "I don't know what bottle you got that drink out of for me last night, Clinch," he

said. "But I got a good idea what you put in it. I just want to tell you to yore face that you're a low down, crooked, eagle beaked rat. And if you want to make anything out of that, cut yore wolf loose!"

"Shut up and get out!" Clinch said.

Lee shot out his left hand, grabbed Clinch by the front of the shirt and jerked him half across the bar. Clinch, pawing wildly, brought a snub barreled bull dog six-shooter into view. So Lee dragged his own gun and smashed Clinch right across the face with it. Clinch grunted and when Lee let go of him, dropped in a heap behind the bar. Lee whirled and went for Jake Dearborn.

The gambler, big and beefy, gave a bleat of fright and tried to dodge. But Lee clipped Dearborn with his gun barrel and the gambler piled up.

Lee turned, ran his glance over the room. Hill Bland, one of the local men, was watching him with something vaguely like approval, but Orin Decker was staring wrathfully.

"Get out of here before I have you thrown in the lock-up!" he roared.

"Bellow and be hanged!" rapped Lee.

[*Turn page*]

MORE PAGES! MORE PICTURES!

America's Favorite Picture Magazine
Now Bigger and Better Than Ever!

NOW ON SALE—15c AT ALL STANDS!

For Men Who are Trained in

AUTO BODY & FENDER WORK

Men 18 to 60. Want a future with good pay, perhaps a business of your own later? If you are mechanically inclined, start now to learn to become an auto body mechanic and fender repair man. This fast growing field has great possibilities for trained men with experience. U.E.I. spare time, home-study training combined with actual shop practice gives you sound, basic knowledge of latest, best methods so you may get the experience which may bring you big pay. Capable instructors supervise your studies and actual practice. Course includes acetylene welding, spray painting, use of hand and power tools, etc.

THOROUGH, RELIABLE TRAINING

U. E. I. has trained men for new opportunity fields since 1927 and many students are now making good. Auto body and fender repairing is one of the best profit-makers in any garage or service station. Little capital required. . . . placement service, or we will show you how to start your own shop. Get the facts FREE, without obligation. Write today.

Training approved under G.I. Bill

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
AUTO-CRAFTS DIVISION
2523 Sheffield Ave., Dept. X-7AB, Chicago 14, Ill.

Gentlemen:—YES! I want to get into profitable Auto Body and Fender Repair Work. Please send me FREE FACTS at once.

*Name*_____ *Age*_____

*Address*_____

*City*_____ *Zone or County*_____ *State*_____

If veteran of World War II check here ☐
☐ Check here for Special Information if under 17.

PHOTO-RING

ANY PHOTO OR PICTURE

Of Sweetheart, Relative or Friend, reproduced permanently in this beautiful onyx like ring featuring the New Magnified Setting! Will last a lifetime! Indestructible! Waterproof! Enclose strip of paper for ring size. Pay postman plus a few cents postage. If you send cash we pay postage. (Photos Returned.)

$1.00
(Expertly painted 25c extra.)

PHOTO MOVETTE RING CO., Dept. T-1, CINCINNATI, OHIO

If Ruptured Try This Out

Modern Protection Provides Great Comfort and Holding Security

Without Torturous Truss Wearing

An "eye-opening" revelation in sensible and comfortable reducible rupture protection may be yours for the asking, without cost or obligation. Simply send name and address to William S. Rice, Inc., Dept. 1-L, Adams, N. Y., and full details of the new and different Rice Method will be sent you Free. Without hard flesh-gouging pads or tormenting pressure, here's a Support that has brought joy and comfort to thousands—by releasing them from Trusses with springs and straps, that bind and cut. Designed to securely hold a rupture up and in where it belongs and yet give freedom of body and genuine comfort. For full information—write today!

MAKE THIS EASY 7-DAY TEST!

DO YOU WANT LONGER HAIR?

Just try this **SYSTEM** on your hair 7 days and see if you are really enjoying the pleasure of **ATTRACTIVE HAIR** that can so very often capture Love and Romance for you.

MARVELOUS HELP for DRY, BRITTLE, Breaking-Off HAIR

WHEN SCALP and HAIR CONDITIONS are normal and dry, brittle, breaking-off hair can be retarded, it has a chance to get longer . . . and much more beautiful.

SEND NO MONEY—*Fully Guaranteed*

Just try the **JUELENE SYSTEM** for 7 days. Then let your mirror PROVE the thrilling results. **JUELENE** comes in 2 Forms ☐ Pomade ☐ Liquid. SEND FOR IT TODAY! C. O. D. $1.00 plus Government charges. It is fully guaranteed. Money back if you are not delighted. Write Now!

JUEL CO., 4727 N. Damen, Dept. B-635, Chicago 25, Ill.

What Every Mason Wants

We have Important Masonic books for Blue Lodge, Chapter, Commandery, Scottish Rite, and Shrine.

OUR RITUALS ARE USED THE WORLD OVER

Send for free catalog of books and rituals for Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, etc.

EZRA A. COOK, Publisher, P. O. 796, GO, Chicago 90, Ill.

GOOD MONEY FOR YOUR SPARE TIME!

Be our Dealer in your locality for STRONG UNION MADE WORK AND SPORT GARMENTS. No experience necessary. Easy work. Millions of workers buy work uniforms. We supply everything needed. Write immediately for FREE Outfit.

ROBT. STRONG GARMENT CO., 319-337 W. Van Buren St., Dept. K-9, Chicago, Ill.

DO YOU WANT TO **STOP TOBACCO?**

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution: Use only as directed.

30 Years in Business

THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton, Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Caution! Use only as directed. Address

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.
489-A FRONTIER BLDG.
462 NIAGARA STREET BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

"There'll be a time when I make this town crawl on its hands and knees!"

What happens between then and the time Lee finally does come back and teach the town a lesson makes MOUNTAIN RIDER, by L. P. Holmes, a novelet that packs plenty of excitement all the way through!

Also in the next issue is YOUTH IN THE SADDLE, an appealing novelet by Stephen Payne. Herb Lingle held the title of "Champion All-round Cowboy," and had won it the hard way, but he knew that this was to be his last Rodeo—his doctor had ordered him to quit. Still there were vital reasons why Herb had to win these last contests, for gamblers were making trouble, and he had to settle the love affair of a young couple. How Herb works the whole thing out will hold you enthralled in YOUTH IN THE SADDLE.

Last but not least of the longer stories in the next issue of RODEO ROMANCES is LOOP LIGHTNING, a splendid novelet by Cliff Walters.

Torch Smith's father had accidentally killed a man in a roping contest when Torch was only thirteen, and the boy's mother hated ropes and roping. But with the passing year Torch's father taught him to be an expert—and the way Torch handles a rope is the basis of a punchy yarn.

There will also be a number of carefully selected short stories and entertaining features—among them THRILLS IN RODEO, by Foghorn Clancy. All in all, the next issue will be a reading treat for everyone.

OUR MAIL BAG

LET'S hear from more of our readers! We are always eager to know your opinions about the stories and features in this and other issue of RODEO ROMANCES. Write and tell us just what you think.

Let's look a few excerpts from the mail we have been receiving recently:

I have been reading RODEO ROMANCES for a long time and think it is wonderful. I haven't any fav-

EXCITING, TRUE PICTURE-STORIES OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST HEROES IN

REAL LIFE COMICS

Approved by Parents and Teachers

Now On Sale—10c At All Stands

orite stories—I think they are all swell. I have never seen a Rodeo, but hope I will some day as I think it would be a thrilling sight.—*Margraeth Biro, Winnipeg, Man., Canada.*

I have just finished reading the latest issue of RODEO ROMANCES and I have enjoyed it immensely. It is the latest one, that is to say, that has reached Scotland. The only Rodeos we see are in newsreels or part of Western films. As far back as I can remember I have always enjoyed such books and films. Some of our women folks don't like Westerns. They say they are always frightened that someone is going to get hurt when they see the cowboys on bucking horses. As for myself, I enjoy the thrills. I have always longed to come to America, but I'm afraid it is too far away.—*Mrs. W. Scott, Dundee, Scotland.*

Just a word to tell you how much I enjoy Clinton Dangerfield's novels in RODEO ROMANCES. I think they are the last word in excitement, action and romance.—*Robert Hanrath, Detroit, Mich.*

I certainly liked the description of the Calgary Stampede by Harold F. Cruickshank in your June issue. I also enjoy Foghorn Clancy's reports on various rodeos.—*John Strangley, Palo Alto, Cal.*

Thank you for the wonderful story of Gene Autry in a recent issue of RODEO ROMANCES. I read the magazine regularly. The first time I bought it I was sold on it for life and I never miss an issue now. —*Margie Alfred, Covington, Kentucky.*

I am a steady reader of RODEO ROMANCES and think it is the best magazine that was ever put on the newsstands. My favorite stories were GREMLINS CALL IT IOVE and DUEL IN THE ARENA—*Rosalie Torstenson, Sherwood, North Dakota.*

Never have I read a more appealing story than THE GARDEN OF DREAMS, by Chuck Martin, in your June issue. Another I enjoyed was TAMING RED WEASEL, by Stephen Payne.—*William Wordells, Denver, Col.*

Your magazine is tops with me. I see the rodeo whenever it hits town and believe you me your magazine sure makes it all so much clearer and more enjoyable.—*Samuel Jannes, New York City.*

I have only been reading RODEO ROMANCES for a short time, but I enjoy it very much. I thought PAULETTE OF PINTO VALLEY, by Johnston McCulley was a swell story. Enjoyed the other stories, too.—*Lula Belle Combs, Lansing, Michigan.*

That's all for this time, but we hope to print many more excerpts from your letters next issue. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, RODEO ROMANCES, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N.Y. Thanks, everybody!

Read RODEO ROMANCES Every Issue!

Kentucky Tavern
BARBECUE ASH TRAY

ALSO AN INCENSE BURNER! It's different! It's beautiful! It's useful . . . attractive for home and office. Handcolored to look like the real firestones. Smoke curls out the chimney. Holds generous supply of cigarettes and matches. Has metal fireplace grill cover which lifts out to remove ashes. Ideal gift. $1.98—includes a package of incense.

$1.98 SEND NO MONEY!

Rush this COUPON
ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART
Dept. 1475, 1227 LOYOLA AVENUE, CHICAGO 26, ILLINOIS
[] Rush Barbecue Ash Tray C.O.D. for $1.98 on money back guarantee.
NAME
ADDRESS

ATHLETE'S FOOT & RINGWORM SUFFERERS

• Get KERODIN for Positive RELIEF... or MONEY BACK!

STOPS ITCHING MISERY FAST! You may marvel at the speed with which KERODIN brings relief. By causing a gentle peeling of the treated cuticle, KERODIN is able to destroy parasites buried under outer skin.

EASY TO USE Just paint affected parts with KERODIN LIQUID every night until relieved (from 3 to 10 days). Use KERODIN POWDER in the morning for all-day benefit, and to kill germs in shoes that re-infect.

Special $1.50 VALUE only $1.00 KERODIN POWDER and KERODIN LIQUID

POSITIVE RESULTS OR YOUR MONEY BACK

Send only $1 for this $1.50 value

KERODIN PRODUCTS CO.
11101 S. Western Ave., Chicago 43, Ill.
I enclose $1.00 in [] CASH [] CASHIER'S CHECK [] MONEY ORDER for Special KERODIN COMBINATION. If I am not entirely satisfied, I will return empty bottle for full refund.
NAME
ADDRESS
CITY ZONE STATE

LAW...

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW. G. I. APPROVED.
LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 10329-L Chicago 5, Ill.

Relieve Misery of ITCH

Relieve itching caused by eczema, athlete's foot, pimples—other itching troubles. Use cooling, medicated D.D.D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Quiets itching fast. 35c trial bottle proves it—or money back. Ask your druggist for D.D.D. Prescription.

Learn PHOTOGRAPHY at Home

Splendid opportunities. Prepare in spare time. Practical basic training. Long-established school. Send for free book, "Opportunities in Photography." No obligation.
American School of Photography, 1315 S. Michigan Ave., Dept. 1807, Chicago 5, Ill.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific CRIME DETECTION!

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Indentification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 800 of all American Bureaus of Identification employ I. A. S. students or graduates. We can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."
INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 7967, Chicago 40, Ill.

WHICH OF THESE *EXCITING* BOOKS DO YOU WANT?

ONLY 25¢ EACH

Now you can enjoy many hours of exciting reading pleasure at a small fraction of the original cost. The Popular Library reprints bring you word-for-word, page-for-page books of proved popularity in durable reprints. Take your choice of the titles listed below.

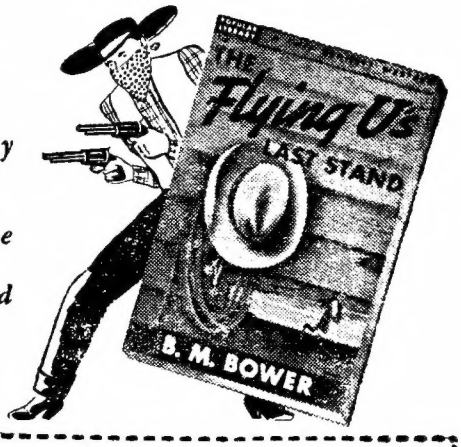
- **EVERY ONE A FULL-SIZED VOLUME!**
- **EVERY ONE A FAMOUS BEST SELLER!**
- **EVERY ONE ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AT $2 OR MORE PER COPY!**

POPULAR LIBRARY *Mysteries*

- 113 CRUCIBLE *by Ben Ames Williams*
- 111 BEDELIA *by Vera Caspary*
- 87 FATAL DESCENT *by John Rhode & Carter Dickson*
- 109 I'LL SING AT YOUR FUNERAL *by Hugh Pentecost*
- 108 THE YELLOW VIOLET *by Frances Crane*
- 98 DIVIDEND ON DEATH *by Brett Halliday*
- 97 A VARIETY OF WEAPONS *by Rufus King*

POPULAR LIBRARY *Westerns*

- 85 TROUBLE SHOOTER *by Ernest Haycox*
- 103 THE PHANTOM CANOE *by William Byron Mowery*
- 114 RAMROD *by Luke Short*
- 86 BUCKY FOLLOWS A COLD TRAIL *by William MacLeod Raine*
- 104 MESQUITE JENKINS, TUMBLEWEED *by Clarence E. Mulford*
- 96 SINGING RIVER *by W. C. Tuttle*
- 95 THE RED LAW *by Jackson Gregory*



POPULAR LIBRARY *Specials*

- 102 DUEL IN THE SUN *by Niven Busch*
- 110 CONGO SONG *by Stuart Cloete*
- 94 THE MORTAL STORM *by Phyllis Bottome*
- 115 POPULAR BOOK OF CARTOONS
- 107 CROSSWORD PUZZLES
- 91 THE SEA-HAWK *by Rafael Sabatini*
- 101 LUMMOX *by Fannie Hurst*

ORDER BY NUMBER
MAIL COUPON TODAY!

POPULAR LIBRARY, INC., Dept. TFG-10
10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.

Send me postpaid the Popular Library books I have circled. I enclose 25c (in coin or in U. S. stamps of small denominations) per copy (NOTE: We pay postage on orders for 4 books or more. If ordering less than 4 books, please enclose 5c per book extra for postage.)

85	91	96	101	104	109	113
86	94	97	102	107	110	114
87	95	98	103	108	111	115

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY & ZONE..... STATE.....

Read the Best Comics in America
GERONIMO!
HERE THEY COME ... THE GREATEST MAGAZINES YOU'VE EVER READ! FOR ADVENTURE, LAUGHS, EXCITEMENT, THRILLS...
Read 'Em All!
10¢ AT ALL STANDS
IT REALLY HAPPENED
BARNYARD COMICS
MYSTERY COMICS
WONDER COMICS
All American BEST COMICS
The BLACK TERROR
GOOFY COMICS
The FIGHTING YANK
HAPPY COMICS
EXCITING COMICS
THRILLING COMICS
Real LIFE COMICS
STARTLING COMICS
Coo Coo COMICS

NEW EVEREADY
TRADE-MARK

FLASHLIGHT BATTERIES

*Now last 93% longer!**

Enough Energy to Hurl This Daring Miss Over 100 FEET!

Imagine!—the girl weighs 110 pounds! Yet the total energy in one tiny "Eveready" flashlight cell—properly expended—is equal to the charge that sends her flying up—up—over the gasping audience, to land over 100 feet away.

PACKED with new dynamic power . . . dazzling in performance . . . durable beyond any flashlight cells you've ever known, "Eveready" flashlight batteries give you the year's greatest energy value. That's a 93% *increase* over the great record made by pre-war "Eveready" cells . . . nearly double the life of light. Yet you pay no more.

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.

30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide UCC *and Carbon Corporation*

High Energy

MEANS BRIGHTER LIGHT, LONGER LIFE

* To you, this means nearly *twice* the energy . . . almost *two times longer life* of bright white light. And it's yours for the pre-war price . . . *still only 10¢!*